1977

Taking Hold : A Study of Land Acquisition, Land Ownership, and Community Development in Northeast Brookings County (1870-1916)

Debra Robson Salonen

TAKING HOLD: A STUDY OF LAND ACQUISITION, LAND OWNERSHIP, AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHEAST BROOKINGS COUNTY (1870-1916)

BY

DEBRA ROBSON SALONEN

A thesis submitted
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree Master of Science, Major in
Geography, South Dakota
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This thesis is approved as a creditable and independent investigation by a candidate for the degree, Master of Science, and is acceptable for meeting the thesis requirements for this degree. Acceptance of this thesis does not imply that the conclusions reached by the candidate are necessarily the conclusions of the major department.

Thesis Advisor Date

Head, Geography Dept. Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who have aided me in this endeavor and it would be impossible to thank them all. However, I would like to give special recognition to a few.

First, it is with deep gratitude that I thank my advisor, Dr. Robert Ostergren, who provided guidance, criticism, and encouragement when needed.

Also a special thanks to Jan Knutson, my sister and research assistant, for the many hours of help in the basement of the Brookings County Courthouse.

Many thanks also to Linda Grieme for being such an excellent typist.

Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Paul, not only for the financial assistance that made this possible, but also for preserving my sanity in those long hours between chapters.

Debra Robson Salonen
Brookings, August, 1977

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Problem in brief

The process of settlement on the American frontier has traditionally been a topic of extensive study for both geographers and historians. Especially intriguing has been the conquest of the vast treeless prairie--an environment remarkably foreign to settlers from the woodland east and Europe. Until fairly recently, however, scholars have tended to look at this process in rather general terms.[1] Studies typically deal with large areas and base their conclusions on the assembly of widely scattered and

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[1]See, for example: Gilbert Fite, The Farmer's Frontier 1865-1900 (New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1966); Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," reprinted from Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893, Vol. H-214 of The Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series in History (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1975), pp. 190-205; Oscar Handlin, Immigration as a Factor in American History (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1959); Ralph Brown, Historical Geography of the United States (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1948); and Ray Allen Billington, Westward Expansion (New York: McMillan Publishing Co., 1949).

isolated pieces of information.[2] As John Fraser Hart states in his book, The Look of the Land, "We need far more detailed and intensive investigations of the interaction of land alienation policies and initial settlement, and their impact upon the contemporary rural landscape of the United States."[3]

The aim of this study is to make a contribution toward this need by investigating in detail the process of settlement in a five township area of South Dakota. Three basic aspects of the settlement process that will be examined are the process of land acquisition, the patterns of land ownership, and the formation of communities. These three areas, in particular, lend themselves to detailed work and stand out in literature as areas of intense interest.

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[2]Some notable exceptions are: Merle Curti, The Making of an American Community: A Case Study in Democracy (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1959); Peter Munch, "Segregation and Assimilation of Norwegian Settlements in Wisconsin," Norwegian-American Studies and Records, 18 (1954), pp. 102-140; John Rice, "The Role of Culture and Community in Frontier Prairie Farming," in Journal of Historical Geography, 3 (1973); and Robert Ostergren, "Cultural Homogeneity and Population Stability Among Swedish Immigrants in Chisago County," in Minnesota History (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society, 1973), pp. 255-270.

[3]John Fraser Hart, The Look of the Land (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1975), p. 59.

1.2 Setting the Context

To set the stage for such an investigation, it is necessary to review first the important chronological and geographical aspects of settlement in the Upper Midwest. The adjacent states of Iowa, Minnesota, and Nebraska were settled much earlier than the Dakotas (Figure 1). Iowa had already achieved statehood in 1846. Minnesota's population grew despite forebodings about hostile Indians and inhospitable weather, attaining statehood in 1858, and in Nebraska settlement spread early upward and outward from posts along the Missouri River.

The advance of settlement into Dakota Territory was delayed until the late 1850's. A treaty with the Yankton Sioux in 1858 permitted white occupation between the Missouri and Big Sioux Rivers. Although tentative advances up the Big Sioux, James, and Missouri Rivers promoted a few permanent settlements, there was no real rush to Dakota. It wasn't until about 1865 that a more concrete interest was shown in the area. However, rapid growth was held in check as Indian problems, severe weather, insect infestations, and lack of communication continued to hamper promotions. The year 1879, however, brought about a significant change in the settlement patterns of this area. It was in this year that a tremendous wave of settlers began what is known as the "Great Dakota Boom". During the following ten-year period slightly more than 24,000,000 acres

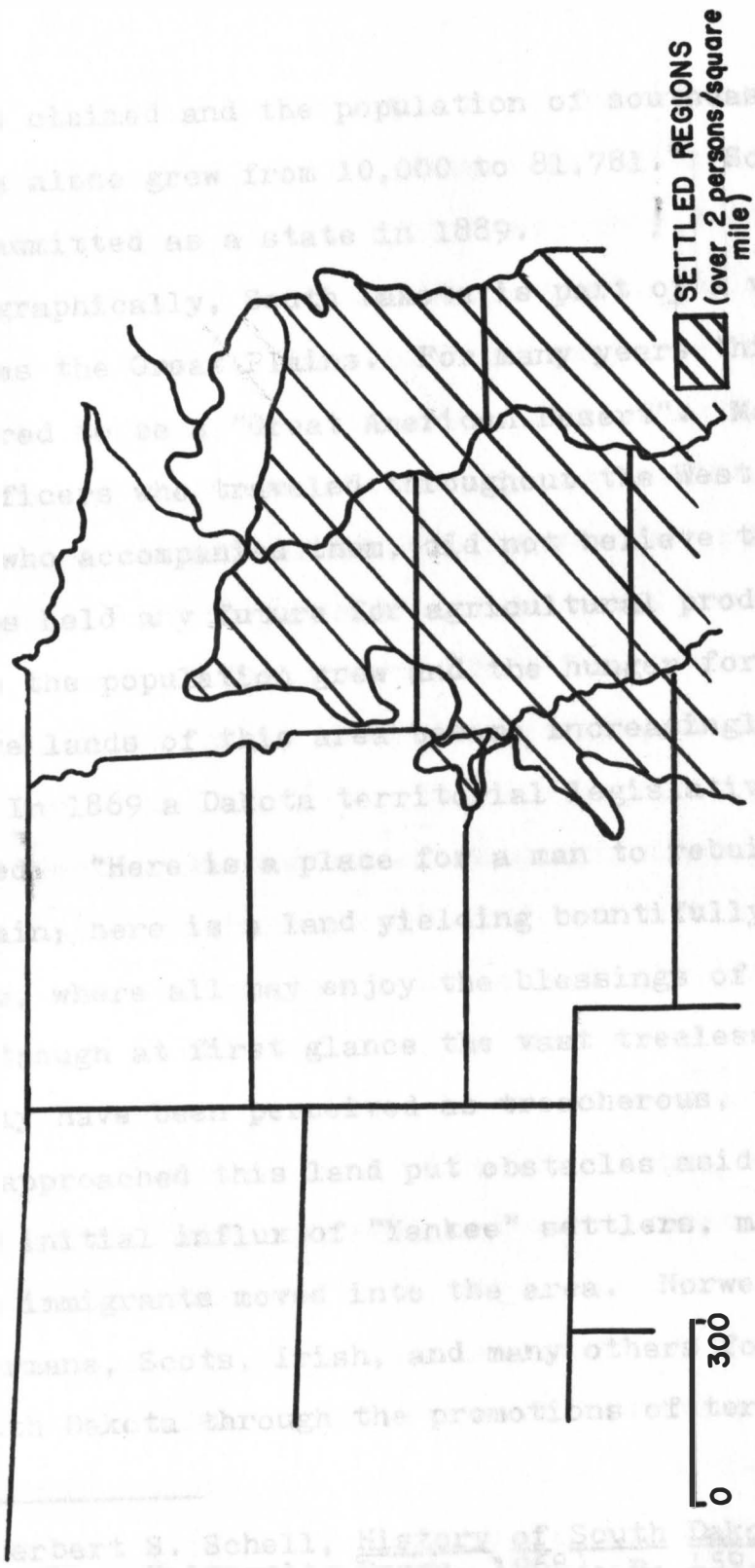
SETTLED REGIONS
(over 2 persons/square mile)
0
300
ADVANCE OF SETTLEMENT IN THE UPPER MIDWEST: 1879

Figure 1

of land were claimed and the population of southeastern South Dakota alone grew from 10,000 to 81,781.[4] South Dakota was admitted as a state in 1889.

Geographically, South Dakota is part of a vast region known as the Great Plains. For many years this area was considered to be a "Great American Desert". Most of the army officers who traveled throughout the West, and the scientists who accompanied them, did not believe that the Great Plains held any future for agricultural production. However, as the population grew and the hunger for land increased, the lands of this area became increasingly attractive. In 1869 a Dakota territorial legislative committee declared: "Here is a place for a man to rebuild his fortune again; here is a land yielding bountifully, open to all nations, where all may enjoy the blessings of home."[5]

Although at first glance the vast treeless prairie could easily have been perceived as treacherous, the pioneers who approached this land put obstacles aside. Following the initial influx of "Yankee" settlers, many groups of foreign immigrants moved into the area. Norwegians, Swedes, Germans, Scots, Irish, and many others found their way to South Dakota through the promotions of territorial

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[4]Herbert S. Schell, History of South Dakota (Lincoln, Nebraska: University Press, 1968), p. 159.

[5]Gilbert C. Fite, The Farmer's Frontier 1865-1900 (New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston, 1966), p. 13.

governments, the railroads, private speculators, and letters from relatives and friends already established. And, through the means open to them, they made this their home.

In any study of settlement processes, the acquisition of land is of vital importance and requires an appreciation of the governmental policies which affected the alienation of public lands. Following the original Cadastral land survey, those aspects of governmental regulation which concerned the Middle West most were the Pre-emption Act of 1841, the Homestead Act of 1862, the authorization of Military Land Warrants, railroad land grants, and the Timber-Culture Act.

The rectangular survey of western lands established a legal grid pattern which prospective settlers could identify. The survey set up subdivisions six miles square bounded by lines identified as range and township lines. These divisions were called townships and were subsequently divided into 36 separate units. These sections of 640 acres were sequentially numbered and were primary to legal identification of the land.

After identifying a certain parcel of land, a settler had several means available toward securing ownership of it. One method was outright purchase from the government or the filing of a Pre-emption claim. The Pre-emption Act of 1840 allowed a person meeting the qualifications of age and citizenship to settle on a piece of land,

160 acres in extent, and at a subsequent date to buy the land at the minimum government price.[6]

As an alternative to outright purchase, the Homestead Act of 1862 provided that any qualified citizen could, for a ten dollar fee, file claim to as many as 160 acres of unappropriated public land. The homesteader would receive final patent on the claim after five years residence on the land.[7] While often thought of as the greatest boon to westward expansion, this Act did, in fact, have limited use east of the Mississippi. Only in the western territory was its impact felt, not only in land alienation itself, but in its enticement of immigrants to the West.

Along the same line, but of lesser importance, was the issuance of military land warrants or soldier's homesteads, as they were called. The practice of giving land bounties in compensation for military services began in the colonial period. For many years the scrip played an important role in expansion and was of special interest to land speculators who could purchase the warrants and redeem them to add to their holdings. According to one authority on public land policy, "The prairie states of the Mississippi valley were the arena of settlement during the years when

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[6]Benjamin H. Hibbard, A History of Public Land Policies (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), p. 158.

[7]Ibid., p. 383.

alternate sections within twenty miles on either side of a proposed line which terminated at Watertown.[10]

The last legislation affecting land alienation policies in this area was the Timber-Culture Act. The original act of 1873 allowed an individual meeting the same requirements as the Homestead Act to claim and receive patent on a quarter section of land if he planted and maintained forty acres of timber over a ten-year period. An amended version met more realistically the conditions of the area and required only ten acres of trees over an eight-year period. The act did permit those who had previously homesteaded to make a Timber-Culture claim as well, thereby allowing landholders to increase the size of their farm.

Each of these land policies had a specific effect on the settlement of the study area which is revealed by local records. However, what may have been the norm for a region in general can be supported or refuted by local conditions and trends. One might hypothesize that the actual taking of the land in a local area was governed largely by three contributing factors: the time span of settlement, the amount of land of varying types available for settlement, and the processes of acquisition. The timing of

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[10]John Hudson, "Two Dakota Frontiers," Annals of the Association of American Geographers 63:4 (December, 1973), p. 445.

the military warrants were most abundant. It is not surprising, therefore, that Iowa was settled in large measure by application of the military land warrant."[8] As the Homestead Act gained momentum, the Soldier's Homesteads decreased in importance. However, Military Land Warrant claims were found as far west as the Dakotas.

Between the years 1850 and 1871 the government undertook a major incentive program whose series of transactions became known as the federal railroad land grants. The government granted 131,350,534 acres to the railroad companies to assist in the building of rail lines into vacant or sparsely settled regions.[9]

This promotion, while of profound significance to many areas, stopped short of South Dakota. A land grant in 1864 gave the Northern Pacific alternate sections of land forty miles on either side of a proposed railroad spanning the Northern Dakota Territory. However, during this time period when most of the grants to western lines were made, the southern half of the territory had not yet emerged as a frontier. Therefore, only one railroad company, the Winona and St. Peter, received a land grant in South Dakota. This grant provided the company with

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[8]Vernon Carstensen, The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), p. 115.

[9]Ibid., p. 123.

settlement was affected by factors including national economic conditions, the local laws of supply and demand, and regional immigration patterns. On the local scale, some types of land were more readily available than others and land was available at different times from different sources. For instance, railroad land was often priced higher than government land and its sale was often delayed. Such conditions naturally affected the pattern of settlement. Finally, the actual process of land acquisition often took on special characteristics. Speculators, for example, could significantly alter the process by which land was alienated from its original sources. This study will examine closely the interplay of government land policy and these contributing factors in a local area.

Researchers have repeatedly stressed that if one looks at the pattern of land ownership in the Upper Midwest, one of the most striking characteristics is the segregation of ethnic groups. It is often likened to an immense "patchwork quilt", the patches made up by solid blocks or colonies of settlers with common roots.

Researchers have also noted that some groups were more inclined to congregate in this fashion than others. In general, it is thought that settlers with Old American origins, that is origins in the Ohio Valley, the South, or the eastern seaboard were least likely to behave in this manner. Settlers with European origins but from English

speaking countries such as Wales, Ireland, Scotland, and Great Britain displayed some tendency to congregate. But the groups that were most exclusive of others were non-English speaking immigrants such as Swedes, Norwegians, Finns, Danes, and Germans. This study will look at the pattern of land ownership in a local area in the light of these differences.

One result of the development of this "patchwork" ethnic pattern is the formation of communities. In order to maintain themselves these colonies had to develop a functional framework or organization. Cultural and social ties to some focal point were necessary to hold these groups of settlers together and to provide some form of identity and way of life. Researchers have put forth the notion that the key to the phenomenon was the rural church. The church provided an institution that served as both a cultural and social center.

However, one cannot expect these communities to function in isolation. They were a part of a larger world, especially in the economic sphere. One's livelihood depended upon trade with forces outside the community such as the railroad, merchants, bankers and the like. In fact, one might suggest that two types of community existed on the prairie frontier--a social and an economic one--and they seldom coincided in terms of geographic extent or

population. This study will attempt to examine this interplay at the local scale.

1.3 Choice of Study Area

The local area in which these questions are to be examined is, as shown on the map (Figure 2), the northeastern corner of Brookings County, South Dakota--a five township area.

Certain criteria, such as size, contributed to the selection of this specific area. The size of the study area is of optimum importance as too large an area carries with it problems of research time and the magnitude of local land records; too small an area would fail to provide comparative data or afford much diversity. Therefore, the five township study area was decided upon.

The second criterion to be established is the timing of the study. It is important to understand the onset and duration of settlement within the selected area. In eastern South Dakota, the greatest influx of settlers followed the time period of the Great Dakota Boom, 1878 to 1887. However, some acquisition was taking place in the early 70's so this study proceeds from 1870 and, to afford a look at community development, will be carried through to 1916.

One other consideration was convenience. This area is located within easy striking distance of this researcher's home base at South Dakota State University.

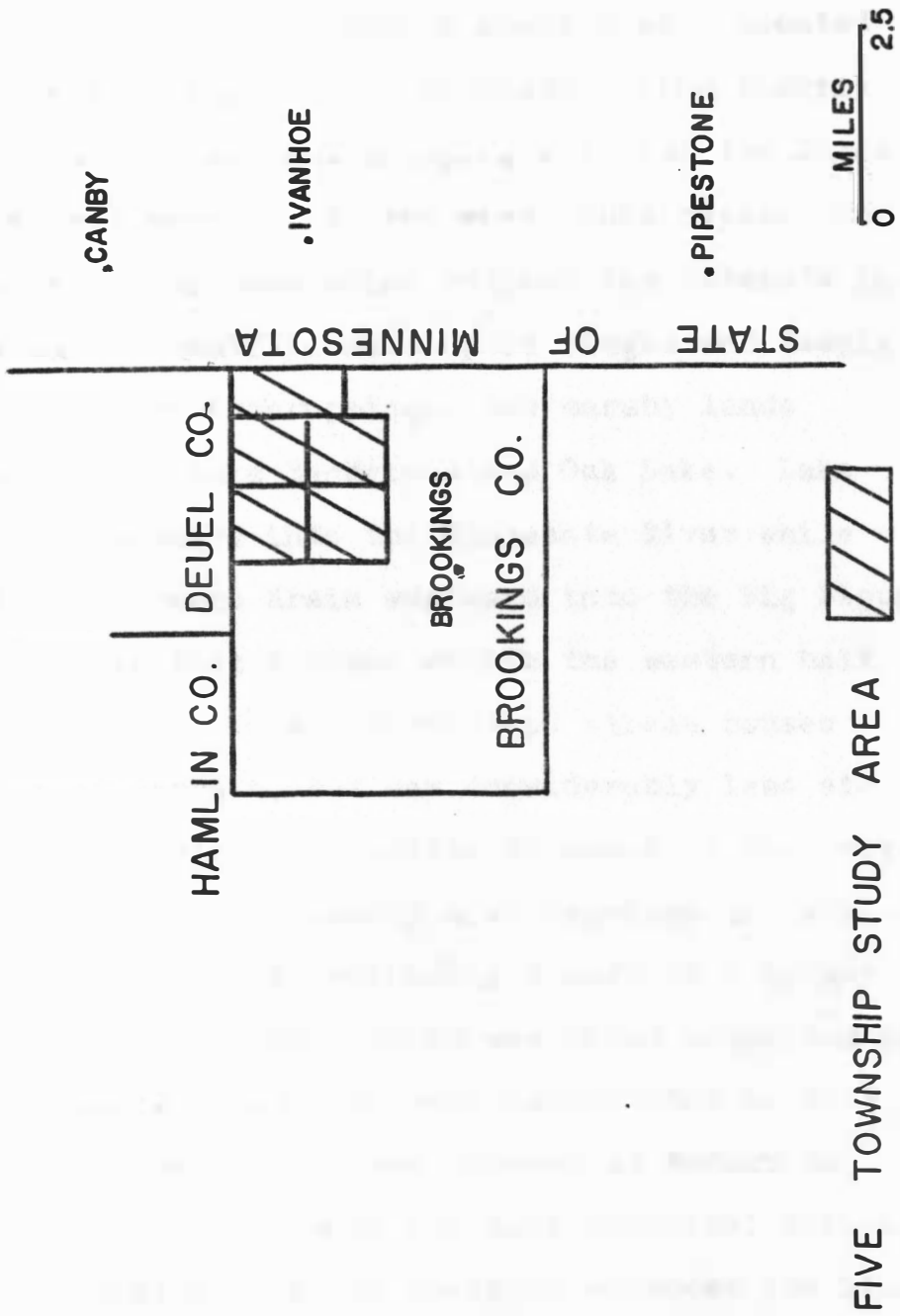


Figure 2

To describe the study area, one might profitably begin with the physical environment. The five townships, Argo, Afton, Oak Lake, Sherman, and Lake Hendricks, compile a very diverse topography for such a small area. Located on the Coteau de Prairie, a rough highland rising sharply above the Minnesota Valley and dropping off into the James River Basin several counties to the west, this region contains two distinct divisions which reflect the Coteau's influence. The eastern half is made up of ridges and deeply eroded valleys, gravel outcroppings, and marshy lands around the two lakes, Lake Hendricks and Oak Lake. Lake Hendricks drains eastward into the Minnesota River while the rest of the waterways drain westward into the Big Sioux River. The most distinct feature within the western half is the Six Mile Creek. This intermittent stream causes some disruption of terrain, but has considerably less effect upon the relatively flat, arable farmland of the area.

Although the five township area provides an excellent basis for study, it is judicially a part of a larger realm, Brookings County. The county was first organized in 1862, but its present boundaries were established in 1873. The first permanent settlement was founded at Medary in 1869 with settlements at Oakwood and Lake Hendricks following in short succession. As the railroad extended its line into Brookings County in 1879 many new towns were platted including Elkton, Volga, Aurora, and Brookings along the

east-west route and Bushnell and White along the north-south access. At the same time many shortlived towns like Medary, Oakwood, and Fountain were abandoned. The railroads brought with them a surging population and promoted immigration. The county population statistics bear out the large immigrant population.[11]

TABLE 1

NUMBER OF FOREIGN AND NATIVE BORN FOR BROOKINGS COUNTY

Year	Foreign Born	Native Born	Total
1870	12	151	163
1880	1,559	3,406	4,965
1890	2,685	7,447	10,132
1900	2,745	9,816	12,561

The predominant foreign group was the Norwegians. Other notable concentrations were the Germans, Danish, Swedish, Irish, and Canadians.[12]

[11] Ninth Census of the U.S., 1870, Population and Social Statistics, p. 305.

[12] Twelfth Census of the U.S., 1900, Vol. 1, part 1, p. 519.

TABLE 2

NATIVITY OF FOREIGN BORN IN BROOKINGS COUNTY
1890 AND 1900

Country	1890	1900
Austria	0	8
Canada	163	145
Ireland	167	117
England	63	58
Scotland	42	24
Wales	5	5
Germany	297	485
Holland	4	4
Norway	1,546	1,382
Sweden	156	187
Denmark	169	269
Russia	22	2
Bohemia	2	0
Finland	0	28
Other	49	36

While it is hoped that this study will reflect general characteristics of the county as a whole, it must be recognized that man-made lines do not always meet the human eye. By the same right, certain inconsistencies in data may be attributed to crossover to and from neighboring townships, counties, or the state of Minnesota.

On the whole, however, the five township area selected for study has provided an excellent base for the detailed investigation called for by Dr. Hart.

CHAPTER II

THE TAKING OF THE LAND

2.1 The Physical Base

Upon arrival in the newly opened territory, the immediate problem facing the settler was the acquisition of land. In order to make a choice, he had to acquire some knowledge of terrain features. He had to ascertain what was available, from which sources, and whether or not he had the means to gain title to it. Moreover, depending upon the time of his arrival, he had to contend with earlier settlers and the patterns of acquisition that had already been established.

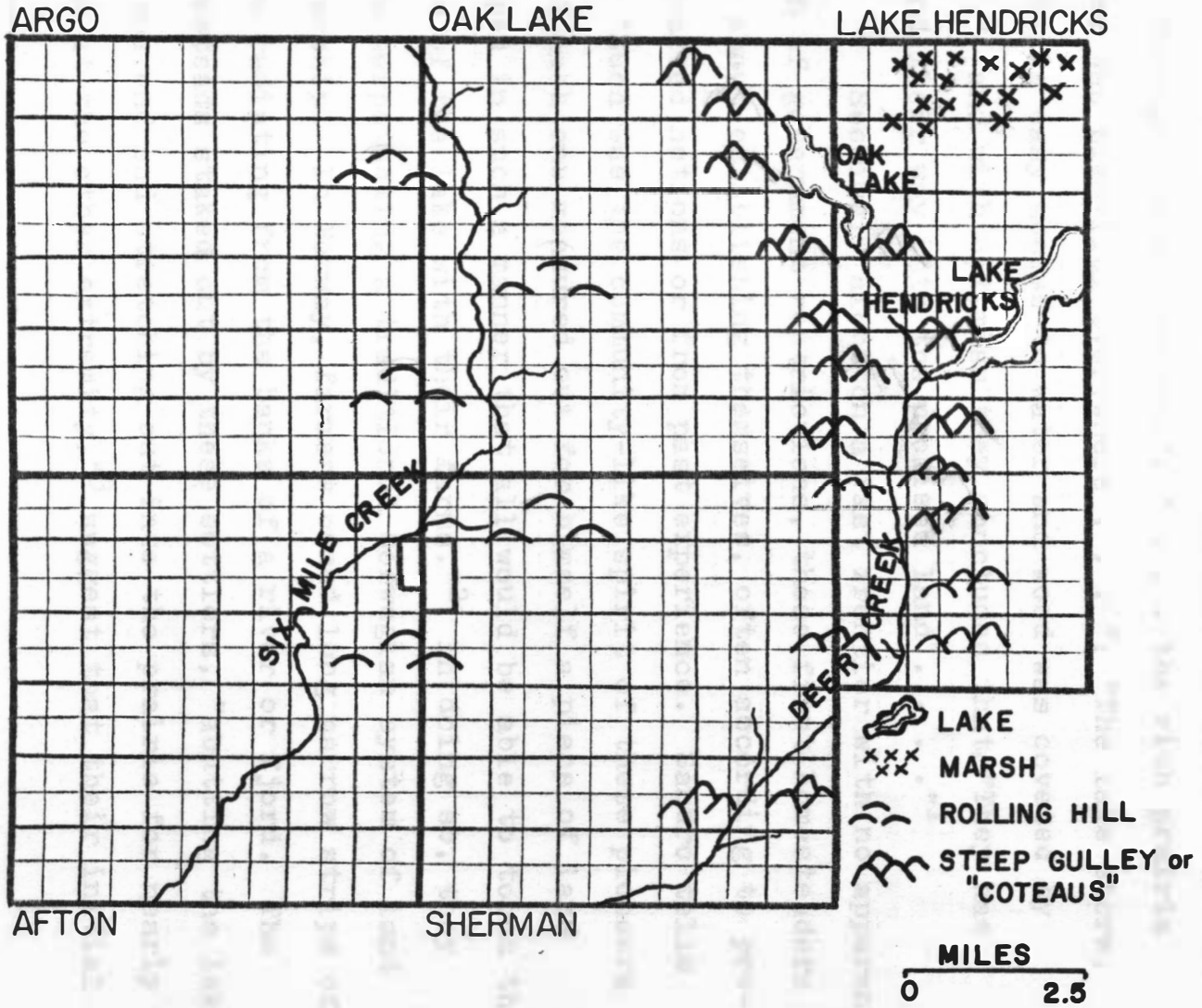
The incomplete information that exists about the early days of settlement in this area suggests that while settlers had a fairly clear view of the environment, they knew far less about what land was actually available to them and about the land policies that governed claims. Their naivete was, however, eliminated rather quickly.

A realistic view of the physical environment as it existed just prior to settlement may be reconstructed from the notes taken by the original government surveyor, whose job it was to note all terrain features to the north,

south, east, and west of each section corner. Figure 3 shows the principal terrain features of the study area about 1870. The extreme northeast was characterized by a great many steep ridges and gulleys known as the "coteaus". Much of the surrounding area was described as "choppy" and "hilly". To the north of the lakes lay a marsh area. Between Lake Hendricks and Oak Lake and along Deer Creek ran a rift-like drainage basin flanked by steep hills. This rather striking feature was in effect a physical barrier to movement and communication. To the west the land sloped gently to the southwest and was drained by the Six Mile Creek, which eventually empties into the Big Sioux River.

While it is possible to reconstruct the terrain from the surveyor's notes, it is impossible to see the land as the first settlers saw it. What were their first perceptions of this new land? How did they envision their future here? In which ways did they adapt to the new conditions? Which aspects of their heritage did they incorporate in their new environment?

Unfortunately, many of the answers to these questions are lost to us. Only a few first-hand accounts have been preserved. One of them traces the path of the Norwegian immigrants who settled in the Lake Hendricks area, and in The Immigrants' Trek, Gustav Sandro relates some of their first impressions: "The prairie stretched out in every direction in such seemingly limitless expanse . . .";



PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

Figure 3

"The region about these two lakes appealed to their fancy more than any other land they had seen on their long journey through the wilderness."; " . . . the rich prairie grass was plentiful everywhere . . . "; "The lake shore, with its easy access to water and wood was coveted by all."; and with optimism they concluded that, "They had found their way into the promised land . . . ."[1]

Seemingly alone on a vast frontier with no apparent sign of government restrictions, these first homesteaders set about establishing themselves, often according to preconceived notions or from past experience. Sandro tells us, "Such was the community-like spirit of these pioneers that each one measured out for himself a piece of land shaped in such a manner that all would be able to touch the edge of the lake with their farms."[2] In doing so, they were perpetuating a traditional Norwegian system of land ownership. In Norway, farmers owned long narrow strips of land radiating from the banks of a river or fjord. The homesteads staked out by these settlers, "abutting the lake at one end and stretching out into the prairie for nearly a mile at the other extremity,"[3] suggest that their initial

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[1]Gustav Sandro, The Immigrants' Trek (Sioux Falls, South Dakota: Sessions Printing Company, 1929), p. 17.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

[3]Ibid.

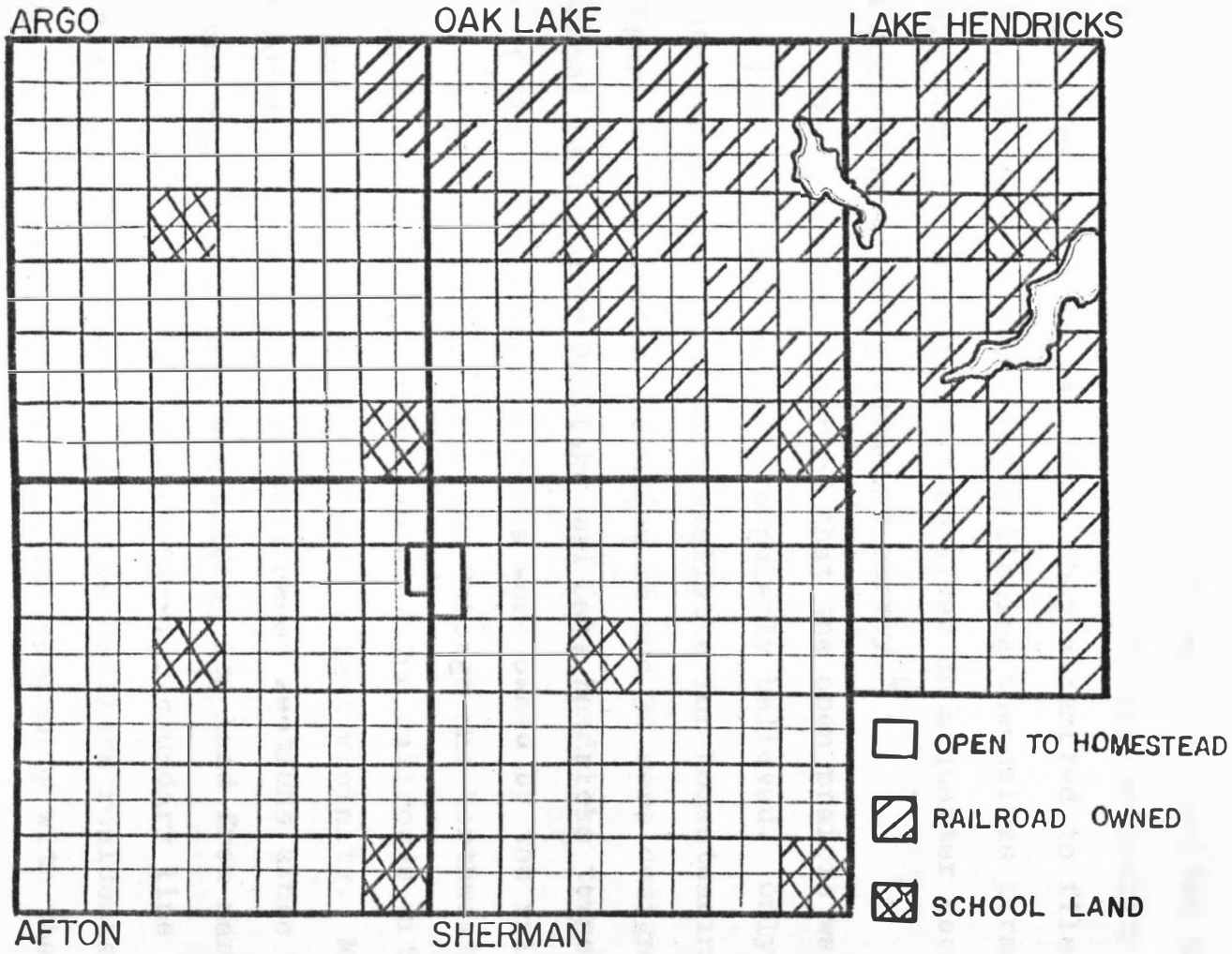

Figure 4

LAND AVAILABLE FOR SETTLEMENT : 1870

perceptions of this environment were probably influenced by their past experience.

Although this system of land ownership suited the needs and desires of this community, its impracticality was realized the following year when they attempted to file claims. Therefore, before establishing themselves permanently, they re-established themselves on a quarter section each according to the government survey.[4]

They also soon learned that the open prairie was not as free for the taking as popularly believed. Only certain sections of land were available for homesteading. As Figure 4 illustrates, sections 16 and 36 were designated as school land and in Oak Lake and Lake Hendricks townships most of the odd-numbered sections were owned by the railroad. In 1874, an agent from the Chicago and Northwestern railway informed local inhabitants of the railroads title to every alternate section of land in that vicinity. Many were forced to move to government owned sections since the railroad was at that time withholding its land from market. It was also learned that the territorial boundary line between Minnesota and Dakota made some settlers residents of Minnesota. In order to maintain the community with the

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[4]Gustav Sandro, "History of Brookings County" (unpublished Masters of Arts Thesis, South Dakota State University, 1936), p. 11.

confines of South Dakota, these settlers moved west to claim sections in Oak Lake Township.

2.2 The Temporal Pattern

The Lake Hendricks pioneers were among the first settlers to take up permanent residence in the study area. They were not, however, the first to arrive in this vicinity. Several squatters had established themselves as early as 1871, but had soon moved on.[5]

Although the Norwegians immediately staked out lots upon their arrival in 1873, the first parcel of land was not recorded with the county registrar until 1875. Thereafter, settlers began arriving in ever increasing numbers and land transactions picked up steadily until 1881, the peak year of land alienation within the study area.

The process of land alienation over time is shown in Figure 5 and reveals a pattern similar to those seen in other studies.[6] After the peak year in 1881, the number of sales declines sharply, although the number of transactions remains substantial until 1887. After 1884, however, an increasing number of land owners begin adding to their holdings. These "second person" transactions (purchases made by established landowners) parallel closely the total

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[5] Ibid., p. 10.

[6] See, for example, John Rice and Robert Ostergren.

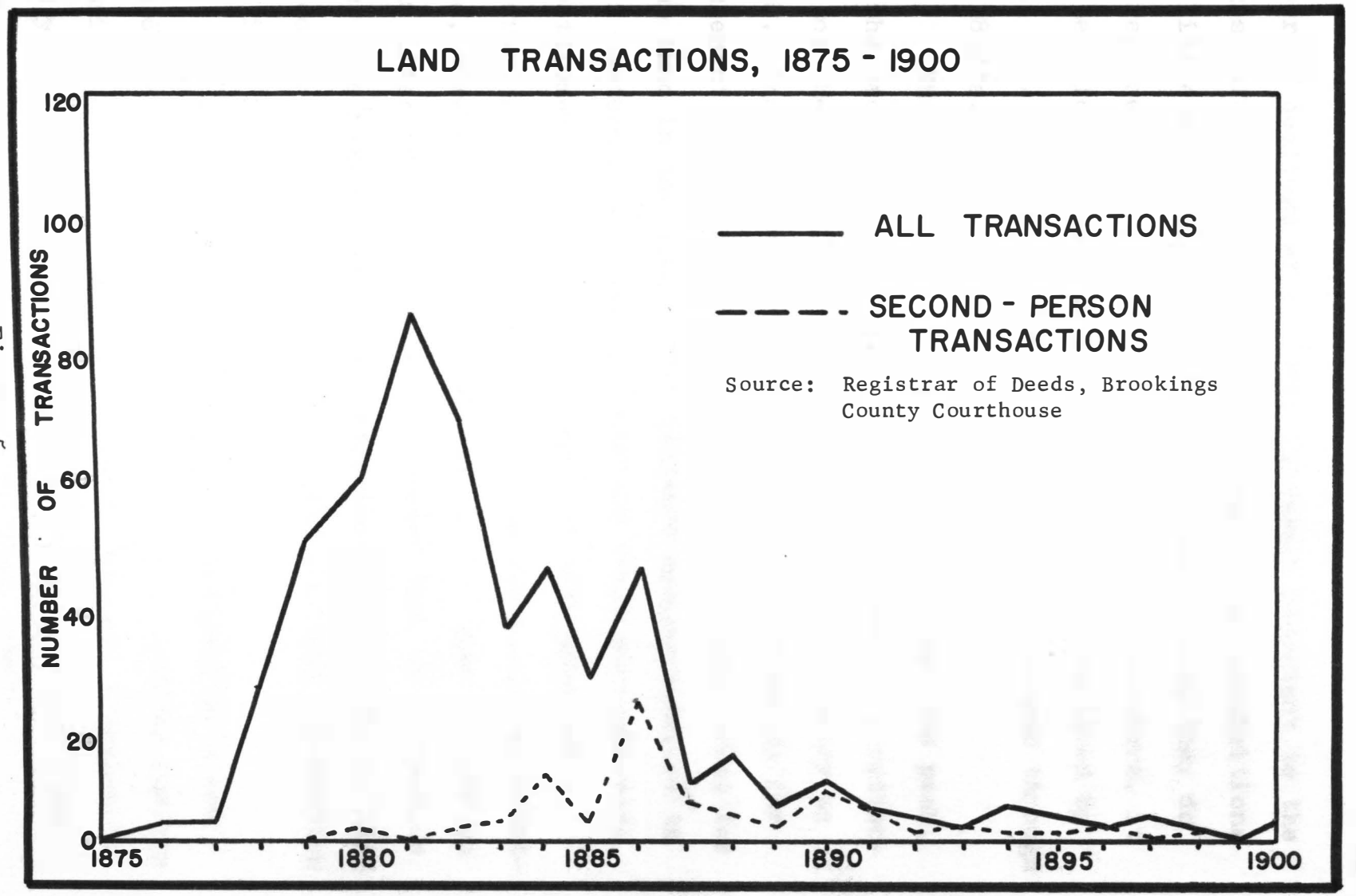
LAND TRANSACTIONS, 1875 - 1900
NUMBER OF TRANSACTIONS
120
100
80
60
40
20
0
1875
1880
1885
1890
1895
1900
ALL TRANSACTIONS
SECOND - PERSON TRANSACTIONS
Source: Registrar of Deeds, Brookings County Courthouse

Figure 5

number of dealings after 1890. Although important to the process of taking the land, these additional acquisitions say little about the process of settlement since they do not represent the arrival of new settlers. Therefore, it can be said that settlement was essentially completed by about 1887 even though land continued to be claimed through the 1890's.

The over-all picture; the steady climb, the peak, and the decline in the number of transactions is a reflection of the general economic situation of the country as a whole. The northern plains region was not opened up for settlement until after the Civil War when a need arose for cheap land in the west. This westward movement failed to reach eastern South Dakota during the first post-war wave of settlement. The financial panic of 1873 produced a temporary halt in that migration. The recession was short-lived, however, and as the business cycle began to pick up again after 1877, the westward movement took on a frenzied pace. The nation-wide boom period lasted from 1880 to 1884 and coincides with the largest increase in land acquisition activity within the study area.

During this period of economic prosperity, a new wave of optimism prevailed in the country. Several factors contributed to this mood on the Great Plains. A series of good years from 1878 to 1886 produced a much higher than average moisture level. At the same time, great

promotional campaigns were being carried on by the railroad industry, which, having recovered from the Panic of 1873, began building anew into the Dakotas. Besides the intensive promotional campaign, the railroad contributed to settlement activity by providing quick and easy transportation and by making available railroad land for purchase by the settlers. Favorable weather, abundant precipitation, demise of the grasshopper plagues, and a general wave of optimism all contributed to the boom years.

Unfortunately, many of these conditions ended abruptly. Local drought conditions soon became regional conditions and severe droughts were suffered in 1887 and 1888. Low grain prices, lack of diversified farming and unfavorable weather conditions all contributed to a worsening economic situation, which is reflected in the curve of land acquisition activity. Nationally, the economy plunged around 1885 and after a slow recovery, suffered fluctuating highs and lows until the Depression of 1894.

Another explanatory factor in the flurry of activity in the early eighties is the great wave of immigration that occurred at this time. As one might expect, the American business cycle and the rate of immigration paralleled each other closely. Good times in America exerted an attractive force in Europe. The economic prosperity of the boom years and the availability of free or cheap land were strong enticements to people who suffered from land

shortages and lack of jobs. A second, even stronger, force was the vast promotional campaigns waged by state and territorial governments and by railroad and land companies. These were intense, highly competitive campaigns as there was a strong demand for population.

Although national conditions seem to be largely responsible for the temporal pattern of acquisition, it should also be pointed out that in some ways the local pattern is unique. For example, while the national economy plunged around 1885, activity prevailed within this area until 1887. This suggests that there may have been a "lag effect". National trends may have taken some time before they were felt on the local scene. It also seems apparent from this material that the process of land acquisition proceeded rapidly. Most of the available land was alienated during the 1880's boom. As the national economy recovered in the 1890's, no corresponding boom in land transactions appeared in the study area. A third observation is that there was a seven or eight year lag between initial settlement and the beginning of second-person acquisitions. This seems reasonable in light of the fact that the length of time to secure patent on homestead land was five years. Another year or two was probably necessary before one felt secure enough to seek additional property.

The temporal pattern becomes more complex when the fact that more than one means of acquiring land was

available. The four ways of acquiring land in this area were: the homestead claim, outright purchase from the government, railroad sales, and the Timber-Culture claim. Each of these methods was of most importance at a different time. Also land was available from different sources at different times.

When the modes of acquisition are plotted over time, four distinct periods of land acquisition appear. The temporal pattern of acquisition by mode is shown by Figure 6. The first period, 1875 to 1879, was dominated by the homestead claim. In the second, from 1880 to 1884, the dominance of the homestead claim was supplanted by outright purchase, although a good deal of homesteading was still being carried on. A third period from 1884 to 1890 introduces the sale of railroad land which had not previously been available for purchase. Some scholars have argued that the railroad withheld its land until most of the free government land was gone in order to obtain a better price. A recent proponent of this argument is Lars Ljungmark.[7] This may have been the case here. Timber-Culture claims were also important during this period. They were, however, of relatively little importance to the actual settlement process since most Timber-Culture claims

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[7]Lars Ljungmark, For Sale: Minnesota (Chicago: The Swedish Pioneer Historical Society, 1971).

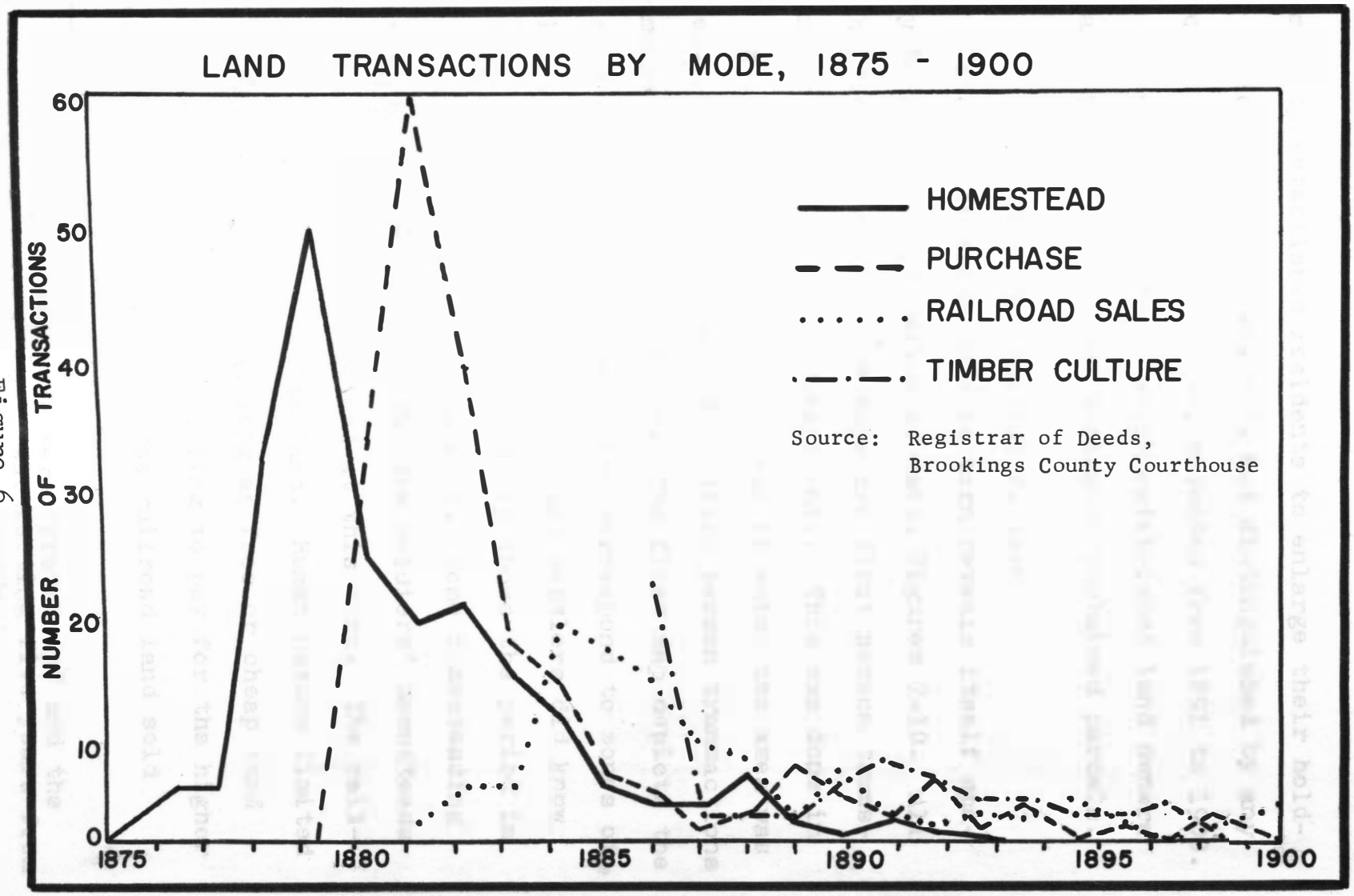
LAND TRANSACTIONS BY MODE, 1875 - 1900
NUMBER OF TRANSACTIONS
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
1875
1880
1885
1890
1895
1900
HOMESTEAD
PURCHASE
RAILROAD SALES
TIMBER CULTURE
Source: Registrar of Deeds,
Brookings County Courthouse

Figure 6

were made by established residents to enlarge their holdings. A fourth period, which is not distinguished by any particular type of acquisition, extended from 1891 to 1900. It is essentially a time in which established land owners gradually picked up the less desirable unclaimed parcels.

2.3 The Spatial Pattern

The way in which this pattern reveals itself spatially is shown on the series of maps, Figures 7-10. All land holdings shown on these maps are first person transactions or claims by new arrivals only. This was done in order to accurately show the process by which the area was settled. The matter of second or third person transactions is complex and clouds the issue. The first map depicts the homestead period.[8] The areas taken correspond to zones of especially good land, which shows that settlers did know what they were doing. The second map shows the period in which outright purchases predominate. Some homesteading was still being carried on. The few soldiers' homesteads taken in this area were obtained at this time. The railroad was beginning to sell its land. Human nature limited these sales, however, for as long as free or cheap land was still available few were willing to pay for the higher priced railroad land. Most of the railroad land sold

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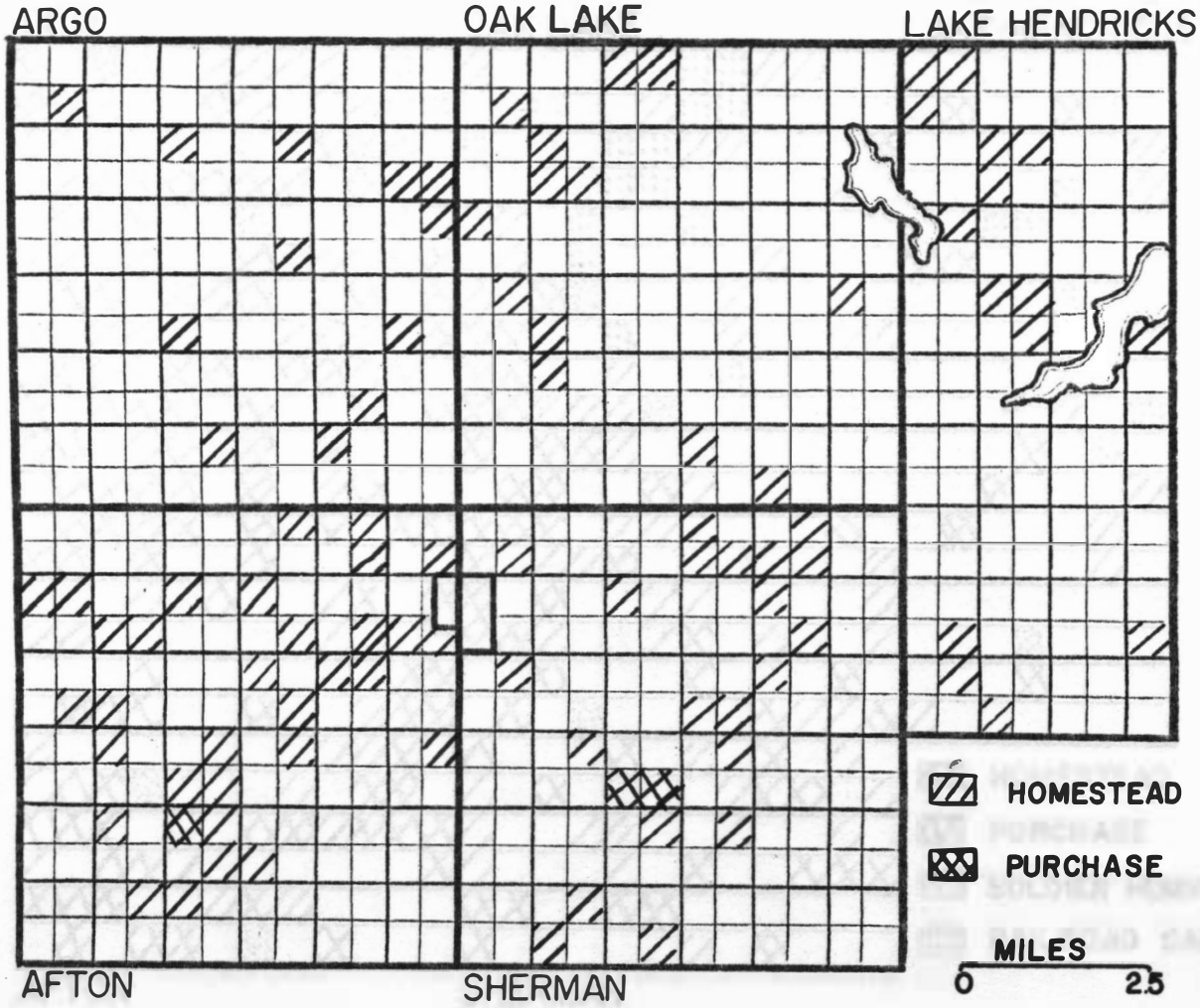
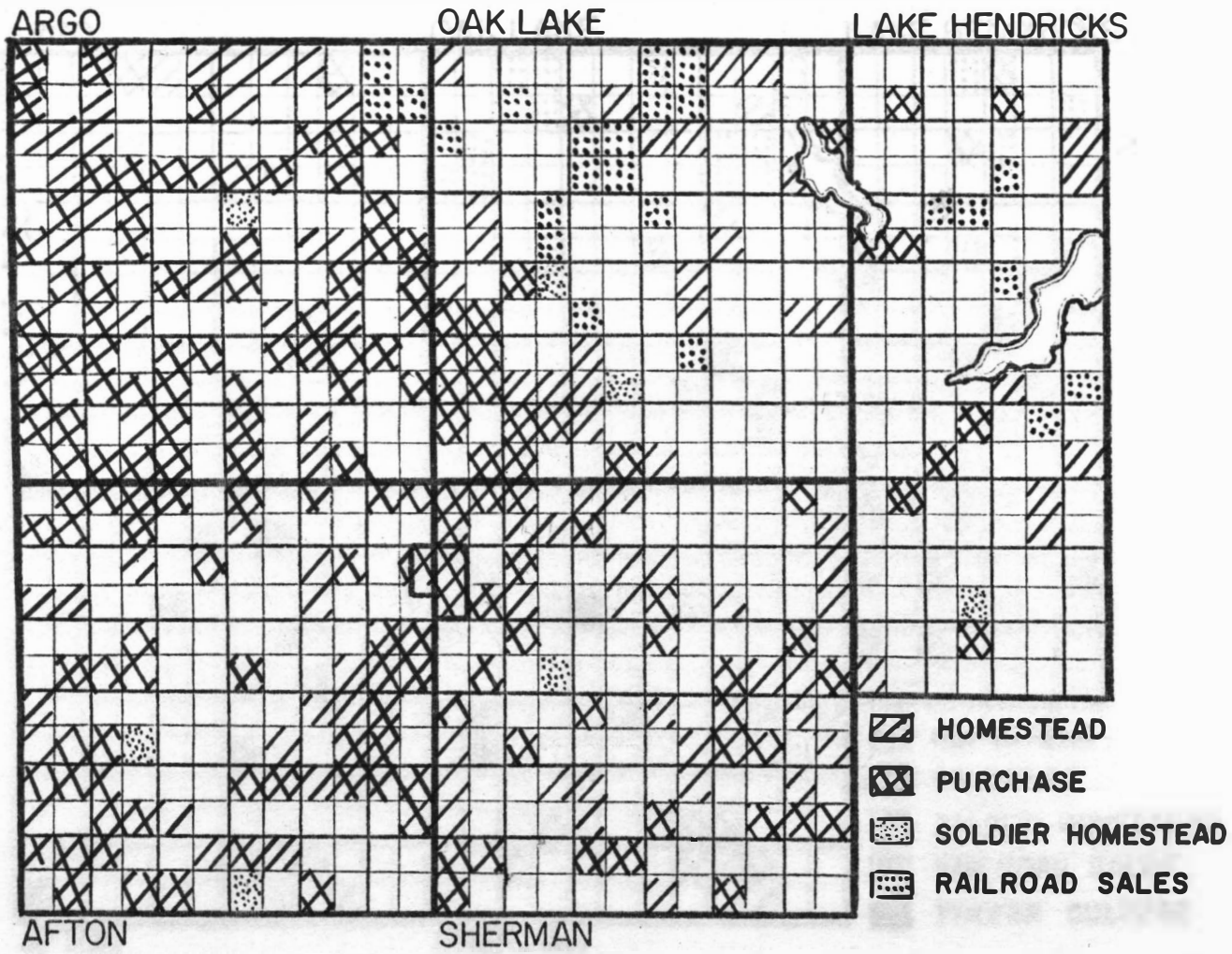
[8]The claims shown here were "proved up" and the date of claim was determined by subtracting five years from the final deed shown in the county records.



Source: Registrar of Deeds, Brookings County Courthouse

PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT: FIRST PERIOD (1875 - 1879)

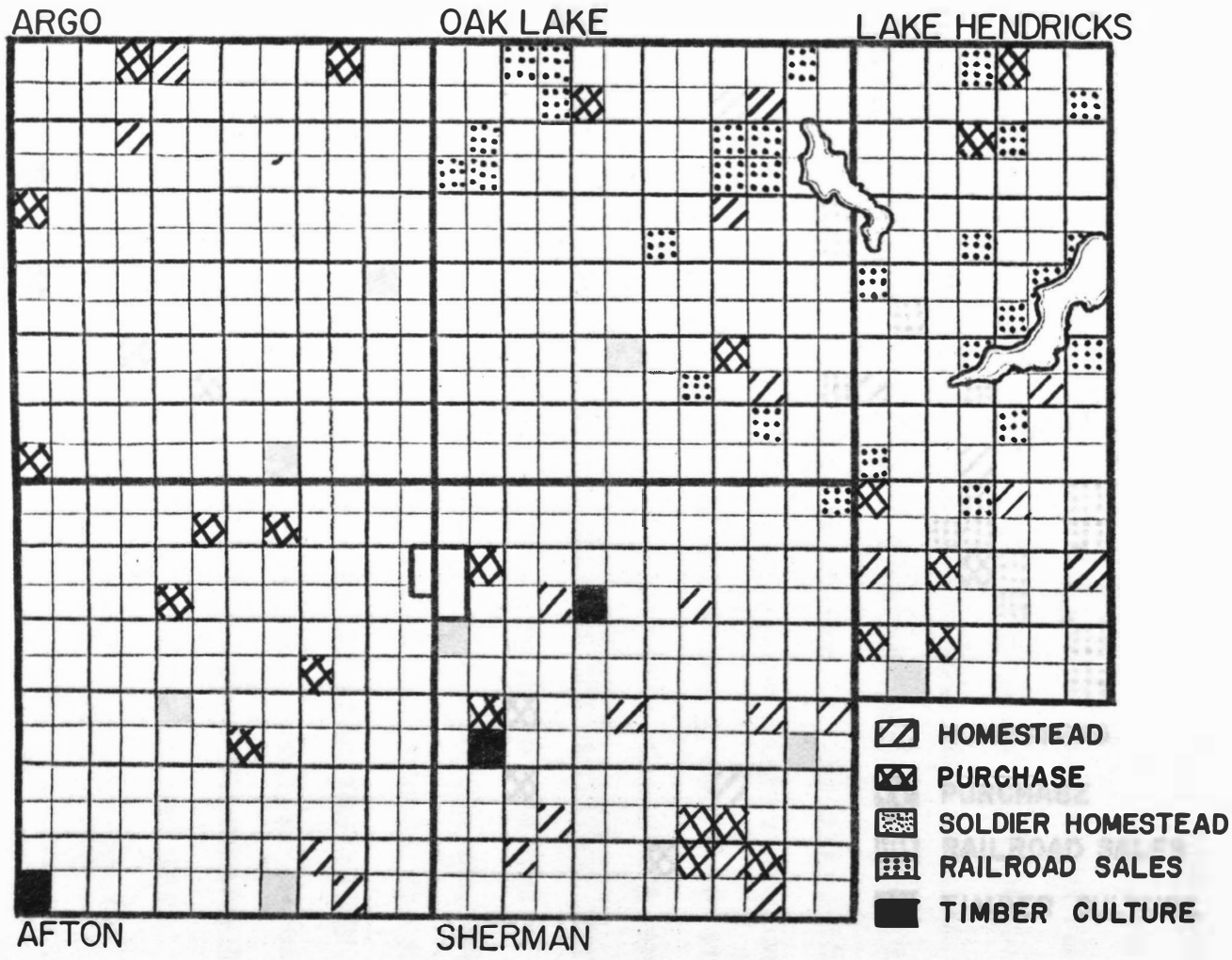
Figure 7



Source: Registrar of Deeds, Brookings County Courthouse

PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT : SECOND PERIOD (1880 - 1884)

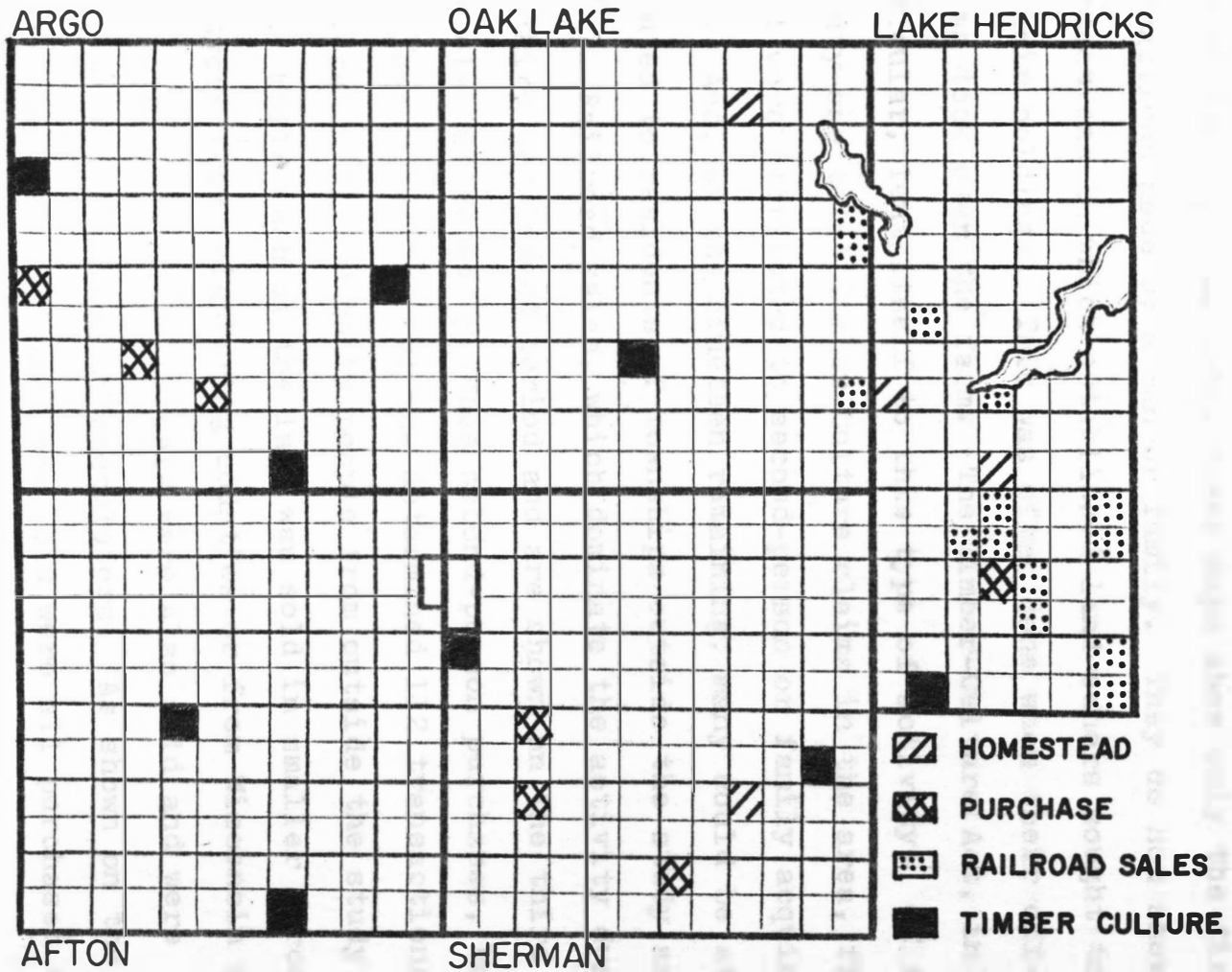
Figure 8



Source: Registrar of Deeds, Brookings County Courthouse

PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT : THIRD PERIOD (1885 - 1889)

Figure 9



Source: Registrar of Deeds, Brookings County Courthouse

PROCESS OF SETTLEMENT : FOURTH PERIOD (1890 - 1900)

Figure 10

during this period went to speculators and much of it was sold in large blocks as can be seen in the north-central part of the map. As noted these maps show only the first transactions made by a man or family. They do not show the transactions in which established land owners sought to add to their holdings. This was often done when their offspring took over the farm. The Timber-Culture Act, in particular, lent itself to this type of activity. Of the seventy-one total Timber-Culture claims in the area, fifty-eight were attributed to second-person or family acquisition. And, of the nineteen remaining, many could be attributed to residents of townships outside the study area.

Railroad sales, which dominate the activity during the third settlement period and are shown on the third map, were also affected by these second-person purchases, but to a lesser degree. Of the determined 112 transactions, fifty-seven were made by people from outside the study area. While much of the land was sold in smaller parcels to buyers from neighboring counties or from Wisconsin and Minnesota, many large parcels were also sold and were clearly the purchases of speculators. As shown on the fourth map, the half sections sold were all purchased by the Eastern Investment Company.

A number of general trends seem apparent from these maps. First of all, the best land went first. The first and second periods saw the alienation of much choice

agricultural land. These acquisitions were mainly the result of homestead claims and outright purchases from the government. Secondly, neither land acquired from the railroad or through the Timber-Culture Act were used much in first person transactions. Both were used by established residents to add to their holdings. Also, most speculator purchases were a later development. While it is possible that many early claims were speculative in nature, only large outright purchases by a single individual or corporation can reliably be accounted as a "speculator" purchase and most of these appeared in later years.

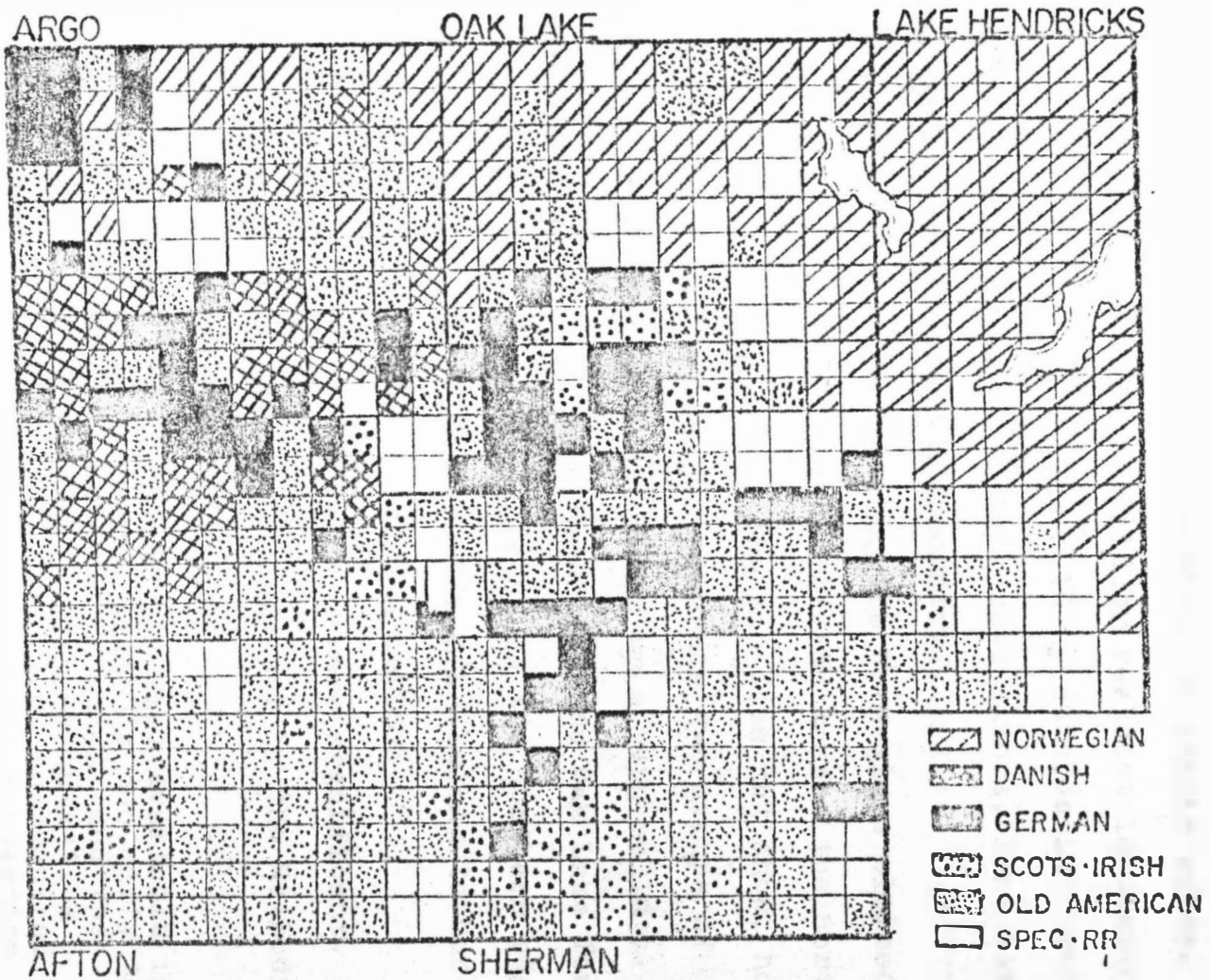
CHAPTER III

OWNERSHIP OF THE LAND

3.1 Ethnic Land Ownership

One of the most striking characteristics of settlement on the northern plains is the variety of ethnic groups. The study area was no exception to this rule. By the turn of the century, the principal ethnic groups established here were the Norwegians, the Danes, the Germans, the Scots-Irish, and a number of English speaking peoples of eastern American or Canadian origins. These "Old Americans" were the largest single group. They were followed, in order of size, by the Norwegians. The Germans were the third largest group, followed by the Danes and, lastly, the Scots-Irish.

Another common feature of settlement in the upper midwest was the tendency for these ethnic groups to form compact homogeneous "colonies" in response to a natural inclination to settle among one's own kind. The map in Figure 11, "Land Ownership by Ethnic Group in 1897", shows the spatial arrangement of ethnic groups in the five township study area. This map is based on a comparison of names of landholders on the 1897 plat map with names



ETHNIC LANDOWNERSHIP : 1897

MILES
0 2.5

Figure 11

generated by a cross reference of available sources.[1] Whenever a positive identification was made, that quarter section held by an individual was given an ethnic value. The shaded areas indicate land held by resident landowners. The unshaded areas indicate land held by outside interests, such as railroad companies, private speculators, land companies, banks, or the state and country.

As illustrated by the map, the Norwegians claimed a triangular block of land that stretched across the northeast corner of the study area. The map does not show, however, that this block actually represents two groups of Norwegians. The Singsaas group makes up a very solid block around the lakes in Lake Hendricks and Oak Lake Townships.[2] The Norwegian landholders along the northern edges of Argo and the northwest edge of Oak Lake belong to Norwegian communities in the neighboring county.

Two concentrations of Germans were significant. The largest group, which was held together by the Methodist

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[1]As the only federal census material available is for the years 1860, 1870, and 1880, which is too early to account for a large portion of the population, and the state manuscript census rolls are no longer intact, a cross-reference system of available sources is required in order to determine the ethnic make-up of the population around 1900. This system uses in conjunction with one another census materials, local histories, church records, and cemetery lists.

[2]Singsaas was the place in Norway (near Trondheim) from which these people originally came.

faith, located in Oak Lake and Sherman Townships near the village of White. A smaller, but distinct, group was situated in Argo Township. These settlers were members of a German Lutheran Church located close by.

Living in close proximity to the Germans of Argo Township were the Danes. These were Grundtvigians, followers of Grundtvig, an ardent nationalist who left Denmark after a turnover in Danish politics. They came from Hjerring and Vrenstad, two points in the northern part of the Jutland peninsula.

The remaining ethnic group, the Scots-Irish, were scattered throughout the area. In spite of their dispersion, some seemed to have a certain cohesive tendency. Those in Afton Township united to form a Presbyterian Church, while the remainder joined an English Methodist congregation. These two churches eventually merged in the mid-1950's.

The remainder of the farm holdings in the area belonged to Old Americans. Although native-born Americans, these settlers were, nevertheless, immigrants at least in respect to their arrival in this prairie environment. A large percentage came from distant seaboard states like New York, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts. Relatively few came from nearby states like Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Iowa, although these states were often a stopping-off point for foreign immigrants and did contribute to the population

in later years. This supports to some degree James Malin's contention concerning migration fields and distance decay as cited by John Hudson.[3] Malin found that within his study area in western Kansas more than three-fourths of the early landholders had migrated from states not contiguous to Kansas. The importance of long distance migration was also supported by John Hudson as a large portion of homesteaders came to his South Dakota study area from Wisconsin, Illinois, and eastern Iowa, while Minnesota contributed little to its early population.

Overall, the most striking feature of the ethnic pattern is the marked segregation and concentration of groups. The Norwegians seemed especially prone to maintain themselves within a restricted area and they appear on the map as a very solid block. Even where two groups lived side by side, like the Danes and the Germans, the boundaries appear to have been clearly delineated. This fact is even more interesting when one considers the fact that the Argo Germans came from Schleswig, a border province that had been under Danish control for centuries.[4] This tendency to maintain separate communities will be examined more fully in the following chapter.

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[3]John Hudson, "Two Dakota Frontiers," p. 447.

[4]Control of Schleswig was a source of political contention and open warfare between Denmark and her German neighbors, especially during the 1860's and 1870's when these settlers emigrated from the area.

3.2 Characteristics of Land Ownership

The most obvious and easily worked-with characteristic of land ownership in an agricultural area is farm size. According to the Brookings County Agricultural Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, the total number of farms for the county in 1890 was 1,555 composing 333,838 acres. The average size of each farm was 214.7 acres. Over the next ten years the number of farms grew to 1,640 and the average farm size reached 277.5 acres.[5] These figures are, of course, for the county as a whole.

Within the five township study area, the figures were somewhat below average. Using the number of farmsteads shown on the 1897 plat map, the total number of farms for the study area was 486. The total number of acres was 96,160 making the average farm size 197.8 acres.

The breakdown of these totals by township reveals some differences (see Table 3). The number of farms per township does not vary greatly from the average of 97.2. However, differences become more pronounced when the size of each farm is examined. Lake Hendricks is well below average in both the number of acres farmed and farm size. The average size of each farm is almost forty-five acres

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[5]South Dakota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, Brookings County Agriculture (Sioux Falls, S.D.: Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, 1969), p. 10.

smaller than those in Sherman Township. Sherman and Afton have the largest farms.

TABLE 3

FARM SIZE BY TOWNSHIP, 1897

Township	Number of Farms	Total Acres Farmed	Average Farm Size
Lake Hendricks	92	15200	156.7 acres
Oak Lake	93	18400	187.8 acres
Sherman	99	20160	201.6 acres
Afton	100	21440	198.5 acres
Argo	102	20960	187.1 acres
Total	486	96160	197.8 acres

To account for these differences, one might look to the people who owned the land. The extent to which cultural background of immigrant farmers affected their farming practices has been examined frequently in the literature.[6] Both Bogue and Curti sought to examine specific farming practices of national groups with differing and somewhat inconclusive results. Others working at a more detailed level have been able to draw stronger conclusions. Taking exception to the Frederick Jackson Turner thesis

[6]See, for example: Allen G. Bogue, Merle Curti, Hildegard B. Johnson, Frederick J. Turner, or John Rice.

that the culture settlers brought with them to the frontier was unimportant because of the equalizing effect of the frontier environment, John Rice sought to prove in his work, "The Role of Culture and Community in Frontier Prairie Farming," that culture did have an effect on the farming practices of immigrant farmers in a six township area in Minnesota.[7] Rice concludes,

> The farming frontier in nineteenth century America was a more complex place than Frederick Jackson Turner made it out to be. Certainly the opportunity to succeed was there for anyone who wished to seize it. But culture was there too, and, especially where it acted to create cohesive communities, it could have made a substantial effect on the decisions people made.[8]

While no attempt is made here to examine specific crop production or farming techniques, it does appear that there is a correlation between ethnic groups and average farm size. Since the size of a farm often reflects the goals and ambitions of the owner, it can be used as a surrogate in this area of study (see Table 4). The Norwegians, who account for over ninety percent of the population of Lake Hendricks Township, have the smallest farms. One might argue that the influence of culture and community would be of considerable importance in such an extremely close-knit community. Furthermore, the fact that this

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[7]John Rice, "The Role of Culture and Community in Frontier Prairie Farming," p. 1.

[8]Ibid.

group was confined by natural boundaries with no space for expansion made farm division the only alternative to losing family members. This was also shown to be the case in Swedish communities in several areas of Minnesota and will be demonstrated more conclusively in the following chapter dealing with community.

TABLE 4

FARM SIZE BY ETHNIC GROUP, 1897

Ethnic Group	Number of Farms	Total Acres Farmed	Average Farm Size
Norwegian	134	23040	171.9 acres
Danish	36	7040	195.5 acres
German	64	12960	202.5 acres
Irish	26	5280	203 acres
Old American	226	47840	211.7 acres
Total	486	96160	197.8 acres

The Danes, Germans, and Irish all maintain farms quite close to the overall average. The fact that so many in these groups were inter-related and had the same surnames made it sometimes difficult to tell what land belonged to whom. For example, in the case of the Irish landholders in Sherman Township, what appears to be a large group of immigrants spread out on fifteen quarters is, in

fact, three families of Scots-Irish descent with multiple claims. If better information were available one might be able to draw different conclusions about the farm size of these immigrants.

On the other hand, the Old American farm size is definitely well above average. This is reflected in the township statistics for Sherman and Afton as well since they are predominantly made up of Old American landowners. It is often suggested that this group of settlers tended to be more speculative and mobile.[9] And, as a result, they often speculated in larger land holdings during the good economic years and leased or sold their land in the event of bad years. This, too, is reflected by the high number of multiple claims shown in Figure 12.

The importance of multiple claims, that is holdings in excess of 160 acres by a single individual, is another characteristic of land ownership commonly investigated. John Hudson demonstrated similar findings in his study of a western South Dakota county. He found that areas dominated by Norwegian settlers had noticeably fewer multiple claims and he hypothesized that geographical restrictions imposed by contiguous group settlement could have been the reason for this. As settlement was so rapid it was not always

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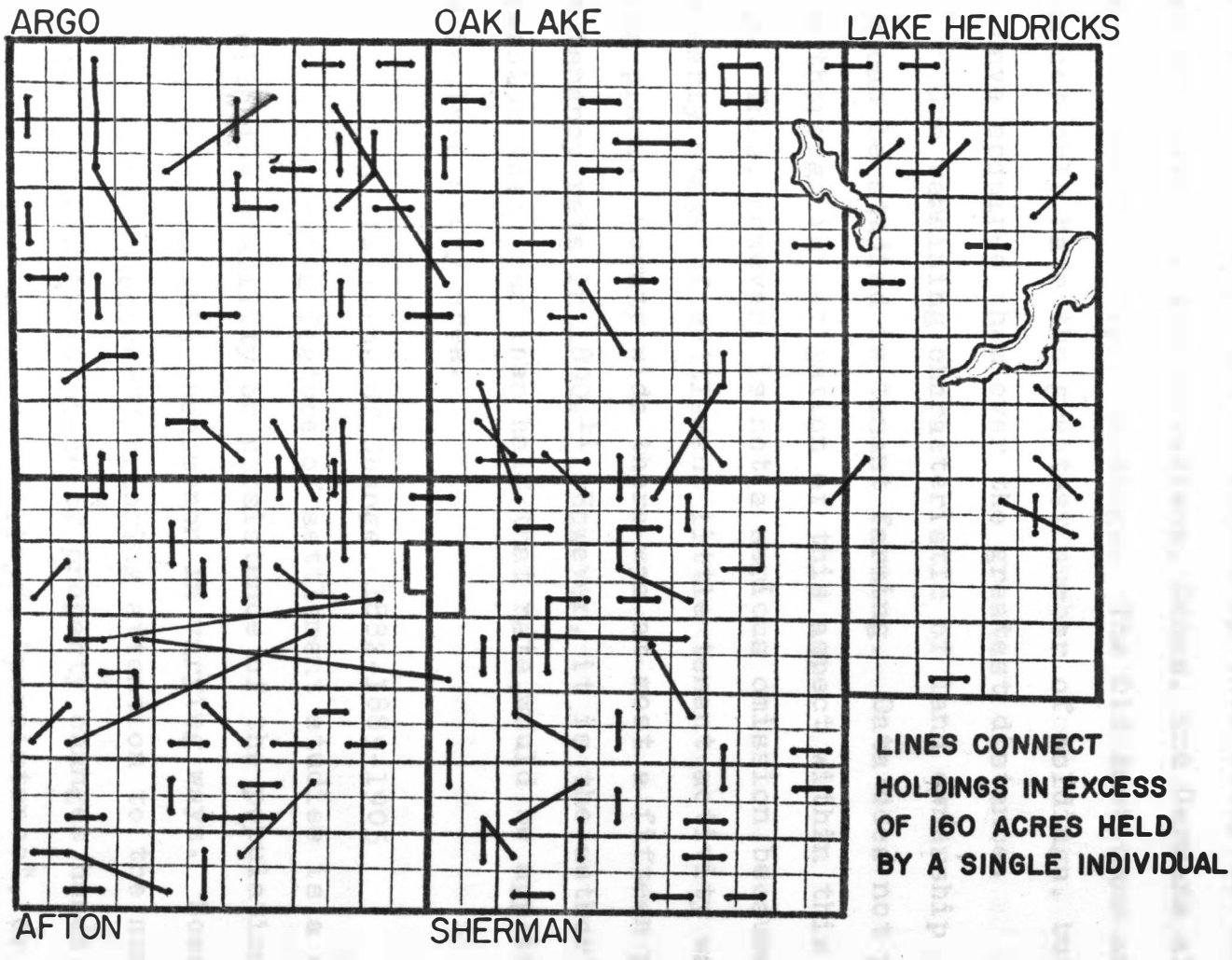
[9]Marcus Lee Hanson, The Immigrant in American History (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 76.



MULTIPLE CLAIMS : 1897

Figure 12

possible to secure contiguous tracts of land.[10] Hudson's findings are in many ways confirmed by this study as the areas dominated by the Norwegians, Danes, and Germans all show the fewest multiple holdings. The Old Americans and Irish not only have the greatest number of holdings, but also have acquired them over the greatest distance.

One remaining characteristic of land ownership which can be studied is tenant farming. Data does not permit a thorough investigation of this aspect within this study. This, however, is not a serious omission because at this early stage of settlement little tenant activity was taking place. County-wide there was at most a fifteen percent tenancy rate in 1890.[11] However, it is the author's impression that less than half that rate would be applicable in this study area.

3.3 Patterns of Change, 1882-1889-1905

A recurring feature of settlement studies is a concern with the stability or persistence of the population. Scholars refer to this phenomenon in varying ways. Some have called it "turnover", bringing attention to the number of instances in which a piece of property changes hands. Others have talked about "stability", "persistence", or

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[10] John Hudson, "Two Dakota Frontiers," p. 449.

[11] South Dakota Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, p. 10.

"stayers and movers", emphasizing the duration or lack of duration of a certain population. In nearly all cases, the findings are based on an analysis of census materials. In other words, researchers have tried to cross-check the names on one census manuscript with the names on a succeeding manuscript in order to find out what proportion of the population is no longer there.

There are a couple of problems with this methodology. Foremost is the problem of death. A certain proportion of those no longer there are missing because they have died, not because they chose to move away. There is, of course, very little the researcher can do to accurately account for them. Another problem is that such efforts are oriented towards the persistence of individuals. But the departure of an individual is not necessarily a sign of population instability. Individuals come and go in all populations, but if the family persists one might say that in its basic structure the population exhibits real stability.

This study looks at population stability in the sense of family stability. To what extent did the families that settled in the study area persist over time? The key to this is the study of land ownership. The advantage of working through land records is that land passed on to other family members at the time of the original claimant's death is not recorded as a turnover. Continuity is

maintained. In population records the death would register as a loss in the population persistence rate.

The years selected for comparison in this study are 1882, 1889, and 1905. This choice was dictated by the availability of data. The names of landowners in 1882 were determined from the county tax rolls. These were then compared to the names on the 1897 plat map. A final comparison was made between these names and the residents listed in the 1905 county atlas. One drawback to this method was that 1882 figures may have been too early to take in the arrival of the total population of several groups. However, the general trend seems to be maintained although the numbers are relatively small.

Three areas of study have been selected to examine the rate of persistence of local landowners. The first, shown in Table 5, illustrates the changes that took place within individual townships. Overall, nearly one half of the original residents were still in the area after fifteen years. This number dropped to less than a quarter when the same list was compared to the 1905 atlas. However, a comparison between the residents in 1897 and those listed in 1905 still reveals a relatively high (44%) persistence rate. One might take exception to the fact that both comparisons seem fairly equal. However, bear in mind that the final comparison does not mean that forty-four percent of the original landowners were still in the area, a figure

TABLE 5

PERSISTENCE BY TOWNSHIP

Township	Number of Family Names in Residence				
	1882	1897	%	1905	%
Lake Hendricks	51	31	61%	23	74%
Oak Lake	48	29	60%	11	38%
Sherman	27	9	33%	2	22%
Argo	53	21	39%	6	28%
Afton	53	25	47%	9	36%
Total	232	115	49%	51	44%

TABLE 6

PERSISTENCE BY ETHNIC GROUP

Ethnic Group	Number of Family Names in Residence				
	1882	1897	%	1905	%
Norwegian	50	48	96%	32	64%
Danish	9	8	89%	5	55%
German	21	16	76%	8	50%
Irish	11	9	81%	5	56%
Old American	116	34	29%	12	35%
Total	207	115	56%	62	54%

that would seem exceptional to such a non-homogeneous group, but rather that forty-four percent of the 1897 landowners were still in evidence eight years later. Lake Hendricks Township maintained the highest average in both instances and was well above the general average. Sherman Township exhibited the lowest persistence rates.

Perhaps the best explanation for these differences lies in the results of the second category, Persistence by Ethnic Group, shown in Table 6. Here the greater stability of the Norwegian population is clearly demonstrated. Only two of the original Norwegian landowners were no longer in the area in 1897. There were sixteen fewer in 1905, but the rate of persistence was still the highest of all ethnic groups. The small numbers for the Danish and German groups are due to early accounting in 1882, as the total number of farms in 1897 were 36 and 64 respectively. However, the general pattern is established as both groups tended to be quite stable. Surprisingly, the Irish showed a high degree of stability. Previous studies have generally concluded that the Irish and British immigrants tended to be as unusually mobile as the Old Americans because they looked on land as something that could be bought or sold to make a profit, while other immigrants viewed it as something to produce a living on.[12] The Old Americans within the study

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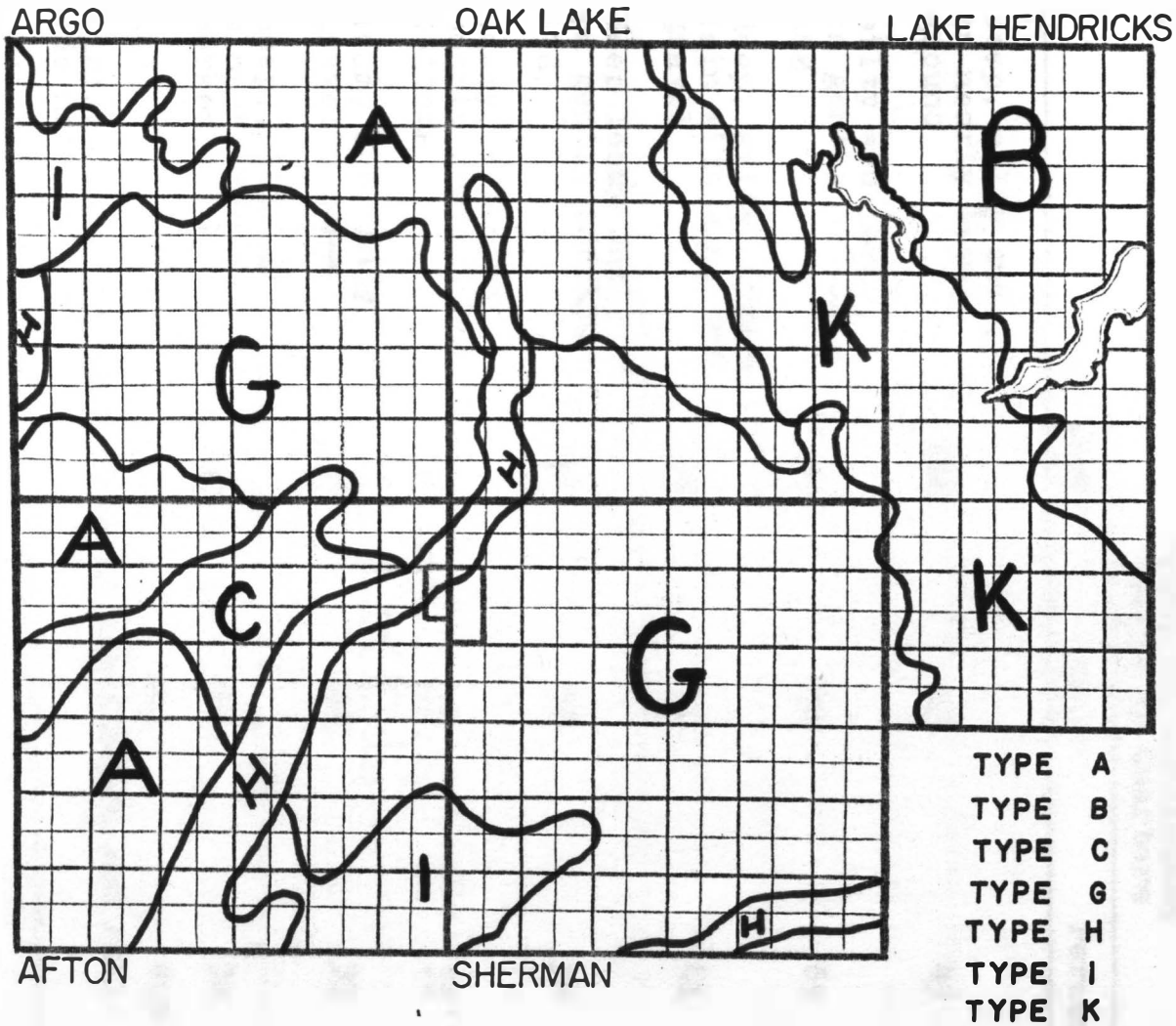
[12]See, for example: John Rice or Robert Ostergren.

area displayed the lowest rate of persistence in both years. This coincides, however, with the general tendency attributed to this group to own bigger farms and multiple claims, but only for a short duration.

Another possible explanation for these patterns could lie in the quality and condition of the land in the study area. Figure 13 shows the basic land types within the area. These are ranked according to their relative quality as established by the Agricultural Experiment Station at South Dakota State University. While dollar values may vary at any time, an approximate ranking would give both types A and B a value of $160/acre. Type C also is relatively high value at $155/acre. However, a step down the scale to the mid-priced range gives type G a value of $122/acre and type H $120/acre. Both types I and K are of lower values, $113/acre and $90/acre, respectively. In comparing the names of landowners within these different land types, only the 1897 and 1905 data was used. This comparison is shown in Table 7. Taken at face value, these figures are generally inconclusive. While there is a slight degree of increased stability shown for the top three land types, only type B showed a substantial rate of persistence and, as type B is found in Lake Hendricks and Oak Lake Townships, which was held almost entirely by Norwegians, it is open to argument whether the stability



BASIC LAND TYPES

Figure 13

TABLE 7

PATTERNS BY LAND TYPE

Land Type	Number of Continuous Owners by Quarters		
	1897	1905	Percent
A) deep, silty soil, on nearly level ground	146	63	43
B) silty and loamy, on gently undulating	75	52	69
C) deep, silty, underlain with sand and gravel	24	10	41
G) deep loamy soil, on gently undulating	228	78	34
H) loamy to clayey, poorly drained bottoms	37	13	35
I) loamy and sandy; gravelly subsoil	36	12	33
K) deep, silty on slopes, worm-worked	59	14	32
TOTAL*	605	242	40%

*unclaimed land and that owned by speculators and railroads not included

is due to land type or ethnicity. One can only say that where the Norwegians did not settle the quality of land seems to have had little effect on persistence.

CHAPTER IV

DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES

4.1 Ecological Organization

The idea of "community" is an ancient one. While primitive man formed relationships for protection, hunting, and self-preservation, modern man knows many types of communities and many theories have been established as to their origins, purpose, significance, and longevity. While there are many specific definitions of community, three characteristics usually considered a minimum are locale, common ties, and social interaction.

The development of community on the farming frontier of the Middle West is an interesting phenomenon that has long captured the attention of scholars. Many have viewed this area as an example of the "melting pot" theory. The famous Turner thesis depicted the frontier as a place where many people from diverse backgrounds came together to " . . . destroy the bonds of social caste that bound them in their older homes," and "to hew out for themselves in a

new country a destiny proportioned to the powers that God had given them."[1]

And, indeed, settlement on the frontier was made up of a great many immigrants who left familiar patterns of life to face a multitude of changes. One of the first changes they encountered was the process of taking land. "The pattern of settlement that had characterized the American experience with the land was one of dispersion, not proximity. Isolated homesteads were the rule rather than villages from which tillers of the soil went out to farm their fields."[2] This aspect of the pioneer experience was at first very frightening as the characters in Rolvaag's Giants in the Earth could attest, "It's all so big and open here-so empty . . . . Not another human being from here to the end of the world."[3]

In face of these bewildering changes, they often sought some security of their past or the "common ties" of fellow immigrants. As evidenced, many pioneers arrived in groups and sought land holdings in close proximity to each

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[1]Frederick J. Turner, "Significance of the Frontier in American History," Bobbs-Merrill Reprint Series H-214 (Reprinted from Annual Report of the American Historical Association for the Year 1893), p. 227.

[2]Jessie Bernard, The Sociology of Community (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman & Company, 1973), p. 95.

[3]O. E. Rolvaag, Giants in the Earth (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1927), p. 47.

other. As G. O. Sandro noted in his History of Brookings County, most of the pioneers came in groups and settled in communities. Within these communities they usually located themselves as near each other as possible on adjoining homesteads, so that most of them had neighbors within half a mile or so.[4]

While the ethnic community may have been the initial focal point of community existence, interaction at different levels soon became the norm as no community can exist in isolation from the rest of society. This interaction soon brought about the development of other communities at different levels.

Basic to all interaction is the setting or environment. Upon this setting certain ecological organizations are superimposed. Whether by conscious choice or not, different functional allocations of land use came to exist. For example, within the study area there exists one outstanding physical feature--the coteau, the rift that separated the high plains from the "valley" or Big Sioux watershed to the west. This feature had an impact on settlement and maintained an influence on the formation of communities. Whether by edict, choice, or convenience, a certain amount of segregation existed between the landholders above the coteau and the "valley" folk below. Convenient lines

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[4]Gustav Sandro, History of Brookings County, p. 42.

of communication and travel were long in coming between the two areas and, for the most part, a degree of segregation still exists today.

Jessie Bernard maintains that "competition among land use was the basic ecological process explaining community structure".[5] At the onset of settlement little mattered besides the taking of land. There was only one immediate land use--farming. In time experimentation and diversification introduced new crops and dairy or livestock grazing into the area. The advent of the railroad brought urban land use to the area. Regardless of the increased competition, the basic occupation of the area was agriculture and, with this strong common bond, the Farmer's Alliance came into being. "In rural areas, beginning about 1883, an organization known as the Farmer's Alliance gained considerable strength. Township groups were formed during the early eighties and regular meetings held."[6] In the White area, the group of over 100 stockholders owned the Farmer's Alliance Elevator and, among other functions, lent money at an interest rate of twelve percent (12%) per annum.[7]

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[5]Jessie Bernard, The Sociology of Community, p. 36.

[6]Gustav Sandro, History of Brookings County, p. 54.

[7]"Seventy-five Years in White," The White Leader, June 18, 1959, p. 3.

The ecological organization had bearing on the development of one other aspect of community--the urban vs rural. The formation of these two poles was not immediately competitive in nature. The town of White grew out of a desire to have a railroad access point. The land for the original plat was purchased by W. H. White and neighboring settlers and donated to the Burlington, Cedar Rapids, and Northern Railroad as a townsite. The town was a convenience for the surrounding area. As Jessie Bernard points out, "Rural villages were more service than residential oriented."[8] As time went on, the function of the town changed and the various types of communities changed also.

This study will look at two examples of ecological communities: the social and the economic. Both meet the general definition of community and both reflect functional activities of the population. And, while the two coexist in often overlapping realms, the history, purpose, and interests served by each may be very different.

4.2 The Social Community

Chronologically, the social community was the first to form. As noted earlier, the immigrants who settled in this area often came here together in groups. Those who came singly usually sought land fairly close to established

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[8]Jessie Bernard, The Sociology of Community, p. 38.

landowners. "Neighborliness" became one of the most important virtues on the prairie. Before long a more formal recognition of these social needs took place and efforts were made to organize around a common focal point. At this time in history, that point was most likely the church.

> The role of the church as a unifying force among the newly arrived immigrant groups in the nineteenth century cannot be overemphasized. For many it was the only contact with the old way of life. It kept the mother tongue alive, at least for a generation or two, and it provided some order in what must have been a chaotic world.[9]

By 1897, there were seven established churches in the study area. Three were rural churches: the Singsaas Lutheran in Lake Hendricks Township, the Argo Pioneer Lutheran in Argo Township, and the St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran in Argo Township. The other four churches were established within the town of White. They were the German Methodist, the English Methodist, Zion Lutheran, and the Presbyterian. Each of these served the needs of a distinct group of people. The spatial distribution of religious affiliation is shown in Figure 14. Each quarter section was regarded as belonging to the religious community of which its owner was a member. Membership was determined from cemetery lists, membership rolls, and local histories.

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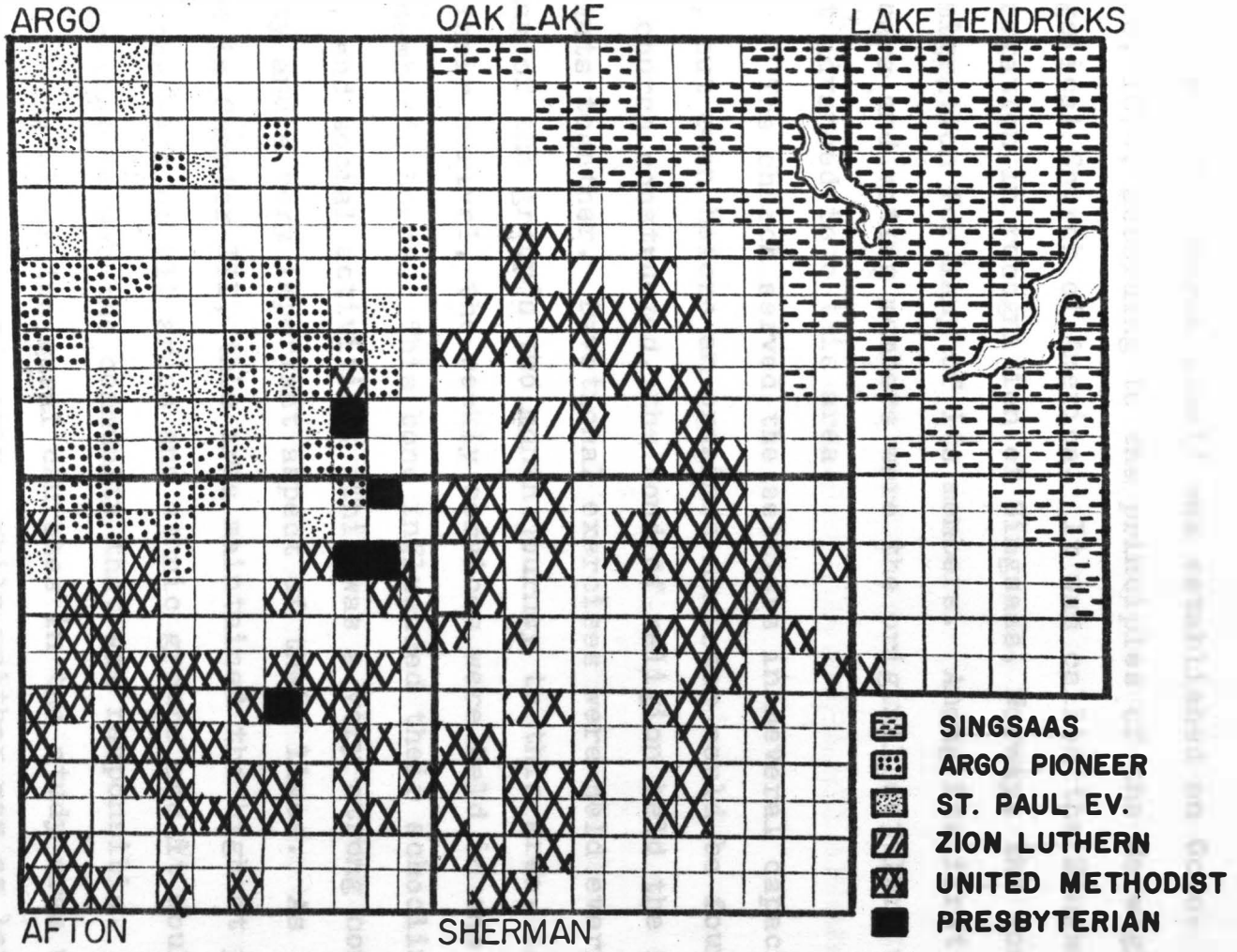
[9]John Rice, Patterns of Ethnicity in a Minnesota County 1880-1905 (Geographical Reports, published by the Department of Geography, University of Umea, 1973), p. 37.



CHURCH AFFILIATION : 1897

Figure 14

The map shows that the most isolated and segregated community is the Singsaas in Oak Lake and Lake Hendricks Townships. The church itself was established on October 26, 1874, according to the principles of the Norwegian Evangelical Church of America. It was called the Singsaas Congregation in recognition of Singsaas, Norway, the source of emigration for many of its members. Among its first officers and voting members were the original settlers who first advanced into this area.

The church served the settlers in several capacities, but even before an ordained minister could be found or a church constructed, the bond of religion held the immigrants together. Devotional exercises were held every Sunday of the group's two month journey to this area. After their arrival, the weekly services were held in one of the member's homes. This bond influenced their schooling, work, and social activities. This was a very strong community and a very important aspect of their lives. As noted in Chapter III, this area maintained the highest persistence rate of all areas and ethnic groups and it would appear that it was the community that was responsible.

The other two rural churches in the study area were both located in Argo Township. While neither was as large as the Singsaas church, their strength must have been in their common ties. For how could two Lutheran

congregations, located so close together, maintain their separate identity without serving special interests?

The Argo Pioneer Lutheran Church was founded in 1884 by a group of Danish immigrants. The founders were ardent nationalists and strongly identified with their religion. As these settlers arrived a few years after the initial settlement period, it was not always possible for them to obtain adjoining property. However, as shown on the map, the community maintained a rather small circumference.

The St. Paul Evangelical congregation also existed within this circumference. And, although their church was built not more than two miles from the Pioneer Lutheran, the segregation between the two was not difficult to discern as the St. Paul congregation was made up of German immigrants. These settlers, too, held services in their homes until the church was organized in 1883. A church building was erected in 1890. Services were conducted totally in the German language up to 1918 when English was introduced as a part-time language. German was still used in some aspects of the service until 1945.

Although this community had some affiliation with neighboring German congregations, like Zion of White and Hidewood of Deuel County, it maintained its separate identity until 1971 when its members were incorporated in Our Savior Lutheran of Brookings and the church was taken down.

Of the four churches located in the town of White,[10] the least is known about Zion Lutheran. Apparently the church is in limbo right now, although a church building still stands. Its original membership was made up of German immigrants who settled northeast of the town in Oak Lake Township. It was organized in 1897 and a church was built the same year on a lot southeast of town. The building was eventually moved closer to the center of town when a lot could be found. The community maintained its separate identity despite overtures to join the St. Paul congregation.

The original Presbyterian congregation was an extremely small group of immigrants from North Ireland. The five initial families organized themselves in 1882. They were joined by three more families the following year. All were landholders in Afton Township and the Bainbridge Schoolhouse in that township was used for church services until 1885 when a church was erected in White. Its membership grew throughout the years to include many townfolk, most of whom were not immigrants of Scots-Irish descent. Although the original basis of organization was lost, the community continued to serve other functions and was an important feature of the White community until the 1950's.

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[10]The Baptist, Catholic, Church of God, and Reformed Churches all existed in White at some time in its history. They were, however, later movements and inconsequential to this study.

The original plat of the town of White provided for the location of two Methodist Churches, the German Methodist and the English Methodist. The German Methodist was the smaller of the two and consisted of families from both White and Elkton. As its list of members was extremely small and it did eventually join the English Methodist congregation, no distinction was made between the two on the map. No distinct membership lists for the English Methodist exists prior to 1887; however, a combined listing for the United Methodist Church is available.

As shown on the map, the majority of the United Methodist congregation was made up of landowners from Afton and Sherman Townships. It should be remembered that these landowners were mostly of Old American background with some Scots-Irish and German settlers. Although the ethnic bond was not a strong factor in the formation of this community, the social-interaction factor was. Church organizations included the Methodist Youth Group, the Men's Brotherhood, which operated a farming project, and the Women's Society of Christian Service.[11]

It may be concluded that these social communities served the needs and maintained the common ties of distinct groups of people. A degree of segregation was often

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[11]"Seventy-five Years in White," The White Leader, p. 6.

maintained for many years. The rural churches were often the last fortresses of the "old" way of life. Their ability to conduct services in their native tongues well into the 1900's is indicative of their desire to preserve their unity against an intruding outside world. Of course, their efforts were in vain as the role of the church was changed and other aspects of life became more important. For instance, it proved impossible to maintain a separate language when the area school system was devised and the youth of the church were taught the English language.[12] Also the American economic system does not lend itself to isolation and, as will be shown in the following section, the creation of economic communities helped bring about many changes in the role of the close-knit church community.

4.3 The Economic Community

The economic community is a very important aspect of life. The realities of the American market system required settlers to involve themselves in the local market economy as soon as possible. And, it was this involvement that led to the formation of economic communities.

No farm was self-sufficient and a great many supplies were needed to carry on daily life. In addition,

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[12]The educational needs of the area were usually handled first by the parochial schools, then by township schools, and, eventually, by a consolidated school system.

harvested crops and surplus goods needed to be sold. Early markets, mostly settlements located along the western border of Minnesota, served the needs of these scattered homesteads. Canby, Marshall, Ivanhoe, and Pipestone were all important early trade centers. Although necessity required it, travel to these towns was often hazardous and always lengthy. The trip from Lake Hendricks to Canby took a day and a half, while the journey to Marshall often took five days.

Mail also made its way over these routes, although no regular mail carrier was put into service until 1878. A mail route ran from Canby, Minnesota, to the "Prairie Farm" post office in Lake Hendricks Township to Sherman Township and eventually the town of Medary. Another mail route served the western edges of the study area as a carrier delivered mail from Brookings to the Argo post office on his way to Gary, South Dakota.

The advance of the railroad into the area simplified the problem of marketing goods and reduced the isolation of the farmers. Elkton and Aurora both drew trade from the study area until the northern rail line was established.

As area towns became established, their fields of influence also became firmly established (see Figure 15). The town of Hendricks, Minnesota, became the regional center for the residents of the northeast corner of the study

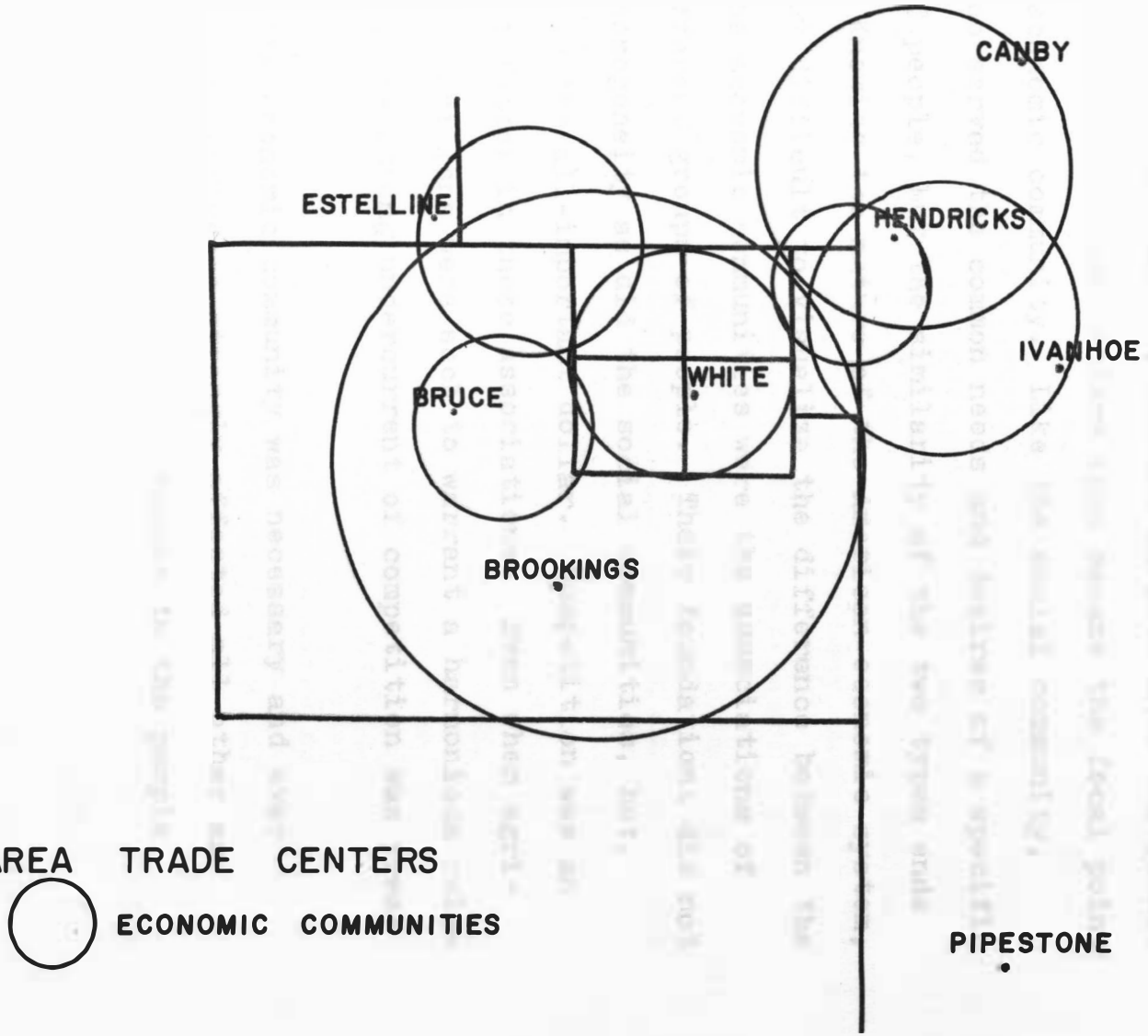
CANBY
ESTELLINE
HENDRICKS
IVANHOE
WHITE
BRUCE
BROOKINGS
PIPESTONE
• AREA TRADE CENTERS
ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES

Figure 15

area. The town of White served the surrounding townships. This pattern was maintained for many years and, perhaps, is still in force today although easy access and methods of travel have brought larger, distant markets into the scene.

The local trade centers soon became the focal point of the economic community. Like the social community, these too served the common needs and desires of a specific group of people, but the similarity of the two types ends there. Knowing the nature of the American economic system, it is not difficult to visualize the difference between the two. The economic communities were the associations of many different groups of people. Their foundations did not lie in homogeneity as did the social communities, but, rather, in the all-important dollar. Competition was an important factor in these associations. Even when agricultural conditions were such to warrant a harmonious relationship, the strong undercurrent of competition was present.

The economic community was necessary and ever present. Its influence strongly affected all other aspects of life. It brought many changes to the people within this study area.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to investigate the process of settlement in a five-township study area of Brookings County paying special attention to the impact of various land policies, the pattern of ethnic land ownership, and the formation of communities. While many extremely interesting and challenging aspects of settlement came to light in the research process, there were also several problems. The most troublesome thing was the lack of state census material. State manuscript censuses would have provided information about local residents at five-year intervals between the Federal Censuses, thereby making longitudinal study simpler. This material which once existed has been reduced to 3 x 5 cards and alphabetized for the whole state which makes it useless for studies of this type. Perhaps with the aid of computers this information could be restored to a county or township base.

As most researchers will agree, if not faced with a shortage of data, one is inundated by an over-abundance of it. Such is the case in the area of county land transactions and tax records. The determination of original

alienation requires many hours, good eyes, and a strong back. However, with adequate classification and organization, county-wide or regional studies of this nature are possible and promising.

Another problem that was encountered was the erratic documentation of church records and histories. The records still in existence are often misplaced or relegated to attics. Few recognize the historical value of original membership lists.

Many aspects of communities were not included in this study, but several interesting questions came to mind for further study. What effect did towns have on rural communities as farm populations changed? When did outmigration become evident? What were the effects of modernization? This study stopped short of the many changes brought about by "progress". While in recent years a renewed interest and pride in one's ethnic heritage and "roots" has emerged, not enough is known about when in history such interests became unimportant and unfashionable.

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